



[Photo : Abraham, Kesate]

HUGH WALPOLE:

A Study

by

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TO
THE SPIRIT OF ROMANCE
IN MODERN FICTION

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NOTE

MY grateful thanks are due to Mr. Mayson of Keswick, for his generous permission to include in this book a selection of the many beautiful photographs which he has taken of the Herries district, and also for the use of the excellent portrait of Hugh Walpole which forms the frontispiece to this volume.

I wish also to express my gratitude to Mr. Walpole, not only for his permission to reproduce the map of Polchester on the end papers, but for his largesse of time and hospitality during the months I was engaged on the preparation of this book.

MARGUERITE STEEN.

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PREFATORY NOTE

THIS book had its beginnings in a conversation across a dinner-table with Mr. Thomas Moult. He asked me if I would care to write on Hugh Walpole for the Modern Writers' Series which he was then editing, and I agreed with so much enthusiasm that I was well into the middle of the third chapter before a regretful note from Mr. Moult informed me that as the series was not proving a success it was being discontinued.

It is a disconcerting experience to find oneself suspended in mid-air, at the third chapter of what one considers is a perfectly good book: so, as it seemed to me that others beside myself might be found to share my belief in its possibilities, I decided to look for a publisher, and then to continue on much the same lines as those originally planned, perhaps expanding my subject a little, and presenting it from a slightly different angle from that selected for Mr. Moult's series.

I am fully aware that in this survey of Hugh Walpole's novels I have made omissions that some of his readers will consider, if not criminal, at least reprehensible in the extreme.

Let me forestall their reproaches by explaining that, since the dedication of this book is to the Spirit of Romance in Modern Fiction, I have tried to concentrate upon those novels which seem to me to express most clearly their author's romantic dæmon. It is for this reason that I have treated more cursorily than their importance warrants the novels of the Trenchard and Beaminster succession; I have, in fact, contented myself by lifting out of them, whole, the elements which to me represent the pure romantic.

There are, undoubtedly, people to whom the adjective "romantic," in whatever connection it may be used, stands for a

term of reproach: for something flimsy, fabricated and evasive—in short, something to be looked down upon. I do not know that the present volume will dispose of their suspicions. They will not like, for instance, to be told that Hugh Walpole borrows the realistic method merely as a cloak for his romantic motive, because for some strange reason this weakens their belief in his factual integrity, a matter upon which this class of reader is inclined to lay undue stress.

Yet there are few readers, even of this carping class, to whom Polchester, a purely romantic creation, is not as real as Winchester or Canterbury, two towns which they can go and identify for themselves. In the process of identification they will discover that Polchester is not either Winchester or Canterbury, but absolutely and definitely itself: so much so that a man once told me that he was prepared to put down a pound note at a ticket office and argue with the clerk that there was such a place as Polchester, on such and such a line, that a train left for it at a certain hour, and that he wanted a first-class ticket and a reservation in a smoking compartment with his back to the engine. That is how he felt about Polchester; which seems to be a conclusive tribute to the realism of the Polchester novels.

But the power and force of the Polchester novels does not lie in their ability to convince the reader of Polchester's geographical existence, but in the impression of a brooding influence which, emanating from the Cathedral itself, conditions the lives of its inhabitants. One cannot accept the one without accepting the other, and herein lies the difference between a book like *The Cathedral* and such a novel as *Magnolia Street*, which flatters one's photographic intelligence because one can say, "I've been there: I took the short cut down Magnolia Street from so-and-so to such-a-place; I remember it perfectly; there was a girl with thick ankles and a purple blouse coming out of a kosher restaurant"—and there one's conception of Magnolia Street stops, as the perception of the Realist stops, at the evidence of the eye and the ear and—let us admit it—the nose. Whereas in writing *The Cathedral* Hugh Walpole

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depended as much upon the emotions and thoughts and imaginations of his readers as upon their physical senses; he went beyond memory into the unknown, instead of making literal use of that which had already been created, he invented a plasm of his own, in which to embody his characters, and this plasm is the mystery of Polchester. One has to feel it, has to try to understand it, or one has only got one-half of the real Polchester.

The conclusion seems to be that a so-called romantic author who can impose an imaginary place, an imaginary community on his readers with so much conviction that they actually believe in and feel its influences, is more truly a realist than the realistic author who merely photographs a section of actual landscape or townscape and relies on his readers' memories for its acceptance. Hugh Walpole is a realist, because he has the whole thing, complete like an apple, in the palm of his hand. He knows that sight and sound and touch and taste do not comprise the whole of human experience; that if one leaves it at that one has broken off half-way: one is only half-conscious of a place, a person or a thing. One is not completely *real*. So the Romantics, after all, are the real Realists.

The reason for devoting a large section of this book to the *Herries Saga* is that, in it, Hugh Walpole achieves his apotheosis as a Romantic writer. It is, in a sense, the *raison d'être* of the present study, for it embodies all the creed of the Romantic and is in a sense a pioneer work of its period. *Rogue Herries* broke down the opposition of the publishing houses to historical fiction and raised a magnificent banner of revolt among all who had tried, or been afraid to try, to get their historical novels accepted. Margaret Irwin, Rose Macaulay, Philip Lindsay—to name only a few of those who have produced distinguished works of historical fiction since the appearance of *Rogue Herries* owe something to the immense popular success of Hugh Walpole's *Herries Saga*, which stands at the head of the Romantic revival which has swept the country during the last three years.

CHAPTER ONE

THE GREAT ROMANTIC

"And when I say romance, I mean a certain kind of unreason which is superficially attractive; I mean a dædal optimism; I mean a leaning towards beauty without any settled notion what beauty should be; I mean a rather blood-shot sentimentalism; I mean a restless inclination to escape from reality and look for a brightly coloured nothing-in-particular; I mean a childish belief in the value of tasting everything that's likely to taste sour or sweet or rancid or spicy or triple-sec—anything that isn't just plain and wholesome.

"When I say romance," he continued, "I mean a certain kind of silliness on a large scale and pleasant scale: I mean a denial of tasteless common sense for the sake of pungent nonsense."—*Juan in America*.

GOD is the Great Romantic.

He happens also to be the Leading Character, Hero or what you will of the majority of Mr. Hugh Walpole's novels.

But that, for the moment, is beside the point. We are about to consider the nature of the Romantic, and where and why he differs from the Realist, and where and how the Romantic triumphs—if he does triumph: which is matter for a debate so acrimonious that it can have no place in this volume.

To the Romantic Tradition is everything: that which has been and shall be, for ever and ever. To the Realist it is almost nothing at all. The Romantic draws his courage, his spirit, his motive force from the Past; the Realist sticks out his jaw and looks life—or what he takes for life—straight in the face. Both of them believe that they See Things As They Are; each is prepared to go to the stake in defence of his convictions. Each is ready, gently, courteously, patiently, to begin with, but with a growing bitterness as the argument proceeds, to convince the other that he is in the wrong; but as the Realist holds that "a

primrose by the river's brim a simple primrose is," whereas to the Romantic it may be anything between a transmogrified nymph and a fallen star, what hope is there of their coming to an agreement? Each regards the other as a fool, and there the matter rests: for it is decidedly easier for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven than for a Realist to behold the Romantic's fallen star, and a whole caravan might pass through the eye of a needle before a Romantic would be brought to recognise the Realist's primrose as a primrose, *tout simple*.

Romanticism will persist in playing Petruchio to Realism's Katharina for ever, but there is no taming this particular shrew.

"Good Lord, how bright and goodly shines the moon!"

"The moon! The sun: it is not moonlight now."

"I say it is the moon that shines so bright."

"I know it is the sun that shines so bright."

"Now, by my mother's son, and that's myself,
It shall be moon, or star, or what I list,
Or ere I journey to your father's house."

Can one picture Realism replying—

"And if you please to call it a rush-candle,
Henceforth I vow it shall be so for me"?

Perish the thought. Realism-Katharina sits down in the hedgerow and flings back her challenge:

"The moon forsooth! I tell thee thou art mad
To call the sun the moon. Here will I bide
Nor stir me hand or foot, before I'll cede
My senses to your madness"—

Or words to that effect. Romanticism-Petruchio gathers vigour from the opposition and heaps Pelion upon Ossa of extravagance, while the sun goes down and the moon rises: and suddenly he points a finger at the moon, and says, "Well, who's right now?" And Katharina, who, like George Washington, cannot tell a lie, is forced into sulky agreement, feeling that

someone has taken a base advantage of her. For life has a way of giving itself a twist in favour of the Romantic; life itself is a bit of a romantic, although you might not think so—a fact of which Mr. Walpole avails himself to the full.

To the Romantic facts are symbols; foolish in themselves as any algebraic formula, they draw their importance only from that which they represent. An elephant knocking off a man's hat is a fact which your Realist is content to accept at face value, as a bit of local colour, an amusing example of horse-play (surely it should be elephant-play ?) or as a tragedy, if the man happens to be a poor man, and the hat his best one. Whereas, to your Romantic, it is the symbol of a whole dynastic downfall. Your Realist argues that to bring about such an effect wars and rumours of wars, plot and counterplot, are necessary; your Romantic simply takes an elephant, and accomplishes it with one flick of a reconnoitring trunk. Whatever remains to be said thereafter is only, in a sense, epilogue to the elephant.

This is unspeakably offensive to the Realist, to whom facts are facts, little hard things, hewn out of boxwood or granite or any impermeable substance you like to think of: each solid, shapely, complete in itself, and extremely venerable. He spends much time in cherishing his facts, in polishing them until they glitter, in weighing one against another; and if, like the grocer's weights, they lose accuracy in handling, he takes pains to have them readjusted.

Another thing which bitterly offends the Realist is the conscienceless way in which the Romantic juggles with words. For the Realist there is only one way of saying a thing—only one way, that is, which is absolutely right and distinct, and which leads the reader inevitably to the correct conclusion. For it is always tremendously important to the Realist that the reader should grasp his exact meaning, whereas the Romantic is content for the most part that the reader shall draw his own conclusions, which he is most obligingly ready to concede are probably as good as his own. For him there are always at least ten ways of saying a thing, each one delicately and subtly

different, yet each converging on the same point of perspective. Words to him are both a joy and a torment. He is able to draw from them a very necromancy of delight, their colours come leaping at him from the written page, crocus and green and lily-white, their sounds chime in his ears an ethereal carillon, of intervals so fine that none but his own can detect them. But there are undoubtedly times when the sweet bells are jangled, out of tune and harsh, and then the Romantic feels that words are a confounded nuisance, that instead of acting as a vehicle for his creative mind they are a positive barrier between himself and the thing he is trying to express: and then, if he is a timid man, he takes refuge in stars or dots—surely the most contemptible of the subterfuges of the writer at the end of his resources.

Taking it as a whole, however, I think it may be generally conceded that the Romantic has more fun out of his writing than the Realist, who, fevered in the chase after the literal, has no time to savour those cooling streams of pure imagination which are the Romantic's true element. While the Romantic abandons himself to the flood, the Realist treads the gritty foreshore, painstakingly scooping out hollows with his toes, peering under bits of rock, and now and again popping a specimen into his collector's case: while the sun blisters the back of his neck and he gets a crick in his spine; really, it is not to be wondered at that some of the work of the Realists strikes a peevish note.

We have already instanced superficially the case of the primrose and the transmogrified nymph: there we had the respective reactions of two distinct types of mind to a single object. To pursue our investigations farther, let us imagine the response of the two types of mind to a word stimulus. Let us choose for our example the word "Screen."

Say "Screen" to the Realist, and he will oblige you with the information that a screen is a useful piece of household furniture, composed of three or more jointed leaves, covered with some air-resisting material, which is placed round a doorway or window to exclude the draught. In a novel or play a screen may

fittingly be disposed round the chair of an invalid or elderly person, or it may preserve the toilet secrets of a woman of fashion from an envious rival; it may form a convenient ambush from which the gangster may "drop" his victim (I believe "putting him on the spot" is the correct expression) or it may conceal the presents which the Uncle from Abroad has brought to surprise his poverty-stricken nephews and nieces. These are suitable and practical uses for a screen, to which, you may observe, is conceded a certain dramatic value. Our Realist may probably add, as an afterthought, that it is a very acceptable accessory to human comfort.

Now; our Romantic is pinned in a chair, and we have said "Screen" to him. Mark the glare that lights his eye! Observe the twitching of his fingers, and the way his mouth half opens as though words are about to burst from it; but he catches them back. Note how the clear light of battle clouds with an uncertainty that almost amounts to distress. For this simple monosyllable has plunged him into a forest of indecision, through which flits a bevy of moonlit forms, each in itself so alluring that the poor soul is beside himself with the effort to make up his mind which to pursue, capture and produce for our especial benefit. He is at the mercy of a million ideas; the word "Screen" has wrought a very distraction of magic in his brain. He endeavours to be practical: tries—poor wretch!—to tabulate: smoke screens, fire screens—the ordinary, needlework kind one still comes across in suburban drawing-rooms, as well as those fascinating frames for samplers or scrap collections, or the even more delightful shield-shaped ones with a tapestry inlay, that slide up and down slim mahogany poles: the big four-leaved one, covered with John Gilpins and Cock Robins and Red Riding Hoods that stood in the corner of his childhood's nursery, Chinese screens spanned by the wings of curious birds, with cherry blossom in full flight of mother o' pearl across the laquered leaves, the pale, latticed screens of the Near East with a continual whisper behind them, and tall, sinister, silent screens of Cordovan leather that an assassin's

knife pierces with sickening certitude; and at last, his brain a-whirl, fearing madness, he grips the arms of his chair and gasps out two words—

“Lady Teazle!”

Not a word, mark you, to explain what a screen looks like; no succinct, comprehensible description of a particular screen in a particular situation, but two words snatched from the bran-tub of his mind: understanding of which depends on the attunement of your mind to his own. This is the kind of thing which the Realist finds completely contemptible, at which he wrinkles his nose with many a “Pish!” and “Pshaw!”

For your true Realist is incapable of understanding that Lady Teazle is the screen, the screen is Lady Teazle: that the screen owes its existence to the fact that Lady Teazle was a rustic coquette, a glorified milkmaid playing at intrigue, whose high spirits find their outlet in plaguing her old husband. How often has she frivelled round other screens than that in Joseph Surface’s library, before she was obliged to make use of one in sober earnest? There was a closet in the room, remember, which would surely have afforded a safer means of concealment. Her eye passes over the door of the closet, lights upon the screen, to which she flies as naturally as a bee to honeycomb; its attraction is irresistible, as, in addition to shelter, it affords her opportunity for eavesdropping. Such women as Lady Teazle move perpetually in an atmosphere of screens, and one cannot conceive that, with

*“I who was once so volatile and gay,
Like a trade wind must now blow all one way”*—

—she bade farewell to them for ever. Having found, too late, that screens betray, she would merely be a little more careful in future. And thus, to the Romantic, all screens are mnemonic of a Georgian flirt who turned moralist at the critical moment!

But here we are—led by a screen to soliloquise on matters at least a mile removed from the serious considerations of this essay. Our digression only serves to point our contention, that

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to the Romantic, the fact, the thing, is only the symbol of an entire situation.

And let us finally admit that the choice of the word "Screen" was an extreme example: that there could be no word more brutally calculated to fling the romantic mind in confusion. The very presence of a screen in the most commonplace of rooms introduces an air of mystery, of intrigue, of concealment—in fact, of all the elements which act as a match to the gunpowder of the Romantic's imagination.

We have already admitted that the Romantic draws his main inspiration from Tradition, that is to say, from backgrounds, beginnings, causes—the background behind the background. He is perpetually aware, in a greater or lesser degree, of the host of unseen witnesses, the incorporeal directors of human destiny; his material is not limited to the visible and tangible, but derives from the multitudinous elements that combine to form the spiritual and moral background to human action. While the Realist busies himself with Effect, the Romantic's main preoccupation is with Cause: and since, if one persists in the search for Cause, one is bound, sooner or later, to arrive back at Primal Cause, it may be postulated that the art of the Romantic shows a definitely religious trend, although what that religion may amount to is entirely a matter of individuality. And, lest the implication should seem to be suggested, that the art of the Realist is lacking in religious quality, let it be assumed that, while the Romantic's art shows what may, for convenience' sake, be described as a Pantheistic influence, that of the Realist may be said, in a general way, to be Atheistic, or, if one prefers it, Rationalistic, in inspiration: and it is plainly obvious that as each of these points of view entails a creed and a set of obligations of its own, each may be called a religion.

The Realist finds his Cause in the immediate present, the Romantic pursues his down the days and down the nights, until he captures it somewhere near the Throne of Light. This seems to be the difference between finite and infinite art, between the straight line and the circle. The path of the one proceeds from

God and leads back to God; the path of the other starts in itself and ends in that petrifying No Time and No Where to contemplate which threatens the seat of reason. The one is creative, the other sterile. Realism is to-day, but Romanticism is Yesterday and To-morrow, To-morrow and To-morrow.

Realism in Literature is a development of the century, which, reaching screaming pitch in the years immediately following the war, has left its indelible print upon the work of the majority of our modern novelists. Even the acknowledged Romantics have learnt to cloak their more daring indiscretions in something that approaches, if it does not actually achieve, the Realistic idiom. This, as the authors of *1066 and All That* might say, "was a good thing," for it meant the abolishment of much of that literary *pudeur* which weakened our output in the eyes of continental critics, themselves untrammelled by a literary censorship. The English writer has suffered from consciousness of public, and has therefore refrained from committing to print matters which violated the stringent pre-war conception of good taste: a consideration which naturally led to the charge of a lack of sincerity from those whose range of subject and manner of treatment were submitted to no such arbitration. In the same way that the War liberated morals and manners, so it liberated their expression in the literary form. It can hardly be denied, even by those to whom the exhibitionist performances of some of the extreme Realists are anathema, that this emancipation brought new life to literature, and that, in the same way that women exercising their privilege of the franchise to-day owe gratitude to the suffragettes who were in part responsible for the granting of the privilege, readers of the new English novel are indebted to such pioneers as James Joyce, who blazed the trail to literary freedom. Lest there be some who quarrel with the use of the word "privilege" in the foregoing sentence, let it be at once understood that the *right* of the individual to enjoy whatsoever type of reading appeals to him is no less positive than the *right* of women to exercise the vote.

The Realists came into their own over the publication of war

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books. Not that the War was the property of the Realists; the Romantics also tried their hands at it, and arbitration was left to the reading public. It simply came down to this: that while one man saw war in terms of body-lice and latrines, another saw it in terms such as these:

“It happened that for several days I worked in the bandaging room under Nikitin. . . . It was as though, through the bodies of the wounded soldiers, I was helping to drive home the attack on our enemy. By our enemy I do not mean anything as concretely commonplace as the German nation. One hardly considered Germany as a definite personality. One was resolved to cripple its power because one believed that power to be a menace to the helpless, the innocent, the lovers of truth and beauty; but that resolve, although it never altered, seemed (the nearer one approached the citadel) in some way to be farther and farther removed from the real question. Germany was of no importance and the ruin Germany was wreaking was of no importance compared with the histories of the individual souls now in the making.”¹

One sees, of course, that it is merely a point of view. Whereas one man has observed the situation from a single and personal angle, the other has walked round it, viewed it from all possible sides, got behind it. The Romantic is at least as conscious as the Realist of the body-lice, but they seem to him beside the point; and no doubt the Realist acknowledges that there are spiritual forces of some kind behind the miserable, bloody carnage; but their sense of values differs. The Realist is very apt to lose himself in externals, while the Romantic, walking on like Johnny Head-in-the-Air, never quite conscious of whither he is heading, is brought up with a bump against some fundamental truth which stuns and renders him oblivious, for a time, to the immediate present and its sordid demands.

The one thing which seems of supreme importance to the

¹ *The Dark Forest.*

Realist, in this connection, is that the loathsome details of his pilgrimage shall be rammed down the throats of those who never experienced them; suffering, instead of rendering him pitiful, fills him with a sort of savage determination to perpetrate it on others. Realism of this kind is a neurosis, a sickness a man must get out of his system or perish; and, in order to justify this public exhibition of sores, the art of Realism has reared its gilded calf in our midst.

To pursue for a moment, this passing consideration of war and realism—Romantic and Realist unite in the passionate resolve to prevent, if possible, a recurrence of war's horrors, but their methods vary. The Realist takes every petty detail of warfare, and, if the metaphor may be excused, rubs our noses in it. Things were like this, and like this, and like this! This was what war meant to us! There was no time for metaphysics and fine thinking, believe us! War was physical; apart from mines, and bombs, and Very lights and aeroplanes, it was the return of the whole human race to primeval slime . . . and then, with a scientist's precision and ardour, he proceeds, on our behalf, to analyse the slime. The Romantic admits the slime, but maintains to the last the supremacy of the soul; war, says he, is a condition of the mind. The more our minds are allowed to dwell upon its exterior forms, the farther we are from its objective, which is peace. Furthermore, while the one regards war as a process of disintegration, the other sees in it a process of reconstruction; while the one sinks into the mire of pessimism, the other rides the high wind of a precarious, although justifiable, optimism.

One is obliged to admit that the word Romance has acquired an antique flavour, an aroma of not belonging to an age which has coined for itself a vocabulary in accordance with its own ideals. In an age of velocity, there is something altogether too leisured about its syllables; it is a Rip Van Winkle of a word, slightly confused in modern surroundings. Romance, whether of individuals, of nations, of ideas, of places, of the Unseen, seems inevitably to belong to the past: which, of course, is a

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false and superficial statement, containing, however, just sufficient truth to warrant our next assertion: which is, that the romantic writer is apt to find his happiest form of expression in the historical novel.

This fact, if one accepts it, explains the apotheosis of Mr. Hugh Walpole in the *Herries* saga, which, in a sense, is not historical, for it makes no attempt to establish a chronological record of any certain period in English history: but which is historical in that it reconstructs, through a group of wholly imaginary characters, a portrait of a period whose better acquaintance must illuminate our more serious historical investigations. Here is a history of private individuals, the *real* history of England, interpreted in terms, not of kings, cabinets, bills and conventions, but of simple people, living an intensive life of their own, in a remote part of the country, yet forming an indispensable link in the legend of the nation's development.

If Hugh Walpole had kept to his modern domestic subjects, with their flavour of modern romanticism, grand as some of these are, he might not have outlasted his period. The mid-century mind is not tuned to the raising of monuments; the literary temple, or that section of it devoted to the writers of the 1910-1933 section—is altogether too crowded for individualisation; it might have been as difficult to find a commanding niche for Hugh Walpole as it would be, at the present moment, to manœuvre another effigy into the marble marionette-show of Westminster Abbey.

But just when his detractors—and what great writer has not these?—have begun to murmur among themselves that he is getting a bit set in his literary output, he produces the *Herries*. Produces them? He flourishes, he brandishes them like a flaming sword in the faces of his critics! One can see him standing on the top of Blencathra, not at all unlike Moses with the tablets of stone in his hand! The Lakeland has given him these, has crowned, has blessed him with its wary, its cautious, but—when given—its unreserved and magnificent approval!

I purposely wish to say as little as possible here of the *Herries*,

for reasons which will appear hereafter; but I cannot refrain from stating my conviction that it is by the Herries books that Hugh Walpole will go down to posterity.

It is a rather grim but by no means incredible possibility that the Herries saga (in a carefully bowdlerised edition) may become a schoolroom classic; that just as we, at the ages of fourteen or fifteen, hated and were hounded through Scott and Dickens, so schoolboys and girls of the year A.D. 2000 may hate and be hounded through Walpole; that just as, a few years later, we found something so absorbing in Dickens that we swallowed him at a gulp, the youths and maidens of A.D. 2010 will discover the Herries saga, and get into untold trouble with their parents and landladies for leaving the lights on after they have fallen asleep.

I myself—I confess it without shame, have just discovered Trollope. That does not mean I have only just read Trollope. I was, to be accurate, seven years old when I first read *The Small House at Allington*. Think of the excitement of discovering, in the year 2033 or so, the second volume of Herries, *Judith Paris*!

If the Realist condescends to history—for his preoccupation is with modern conditions; analysis, not synthesis, being his forte—he dedicates the raised eyebrow of regret to the fact that so little authentic material is available that bears on the mentality of the Middle Ages that no conscientious writer can pretend to create a veracious account of any mediæval situation. Without pausing to acknowledge our pity for a mind that cannot accept *Richard Yea and Nay* as utterly veracious, he continues: Drama? Oh, yes; laid on with a trowel—if you like that sort of thing. Of course, drama of that kind conveys absolutely nothing to the modern mind. A pit disaster, now!—The collapse of a sky-scraper!—He licks his lips like a cat with a saucer of cream. Colour? Oh, distance, you know—you romantic fellows! The Middle Ages must have been drab enough—that's why they made the most of their jousts and their Courts of Love. What about the law courts? Dirt-track racing? There's

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colour for you—fine, steely colour: subtle: with an intellectual rather than an emotional appeal about it. None of your primary stuff like children's picture books. The Middle Ages!—The very wearing of the *hennin* puts them out of court. How can one expect a woman wearing a *hennin* to get down to bedrock? And the chastity belt—blah!

Now, the curious fact persists, that the Romantic, while patiently and with infinite accumulation of detail engaged in the reconstruction of his period, whether that be mediæval or Carolean, honestly believes himself to be a Realist, and may even expose himself to obloquy by saying as much; for the characters which have come to life on his page are at least as credible to him as the most photographic and recognisable children of the Realist's imagination. Every Romantic prides himself on being able, if need arise, to be as realistic as anyone; but the Realist exists in a perpetual state of thanking God that he is not a Romantic. Each believes that the world which he sees is the only true and genuine one, so each continues to call the other a fool and a liar. There is really no question of amicable settlement, because neither will allow that, with the passage of time, the two types of fiction are drawing nearer and nearer to fusion, that the Romantic, as pure and simple Romantic, is almost as extinct as the dodo, and that the Realist has very rarely complete courage of his realism, and that the extinction of the first and the lack of conviction of the second are due to the same cause—for each is forced, by the very terms of his existence, to pay tribute to Cæsar, who happens, in their case, to be the reading public.

Let us pause to consider the demands of this important and authoritative commission which, among other matters, has decided the form of the English novel: this parliament, which, like its prototype of Westminster, consists of a powerful government, a small but virulent opposition, and a few fluctuating parties, which vary in number and constitution so continually that one may speak of them as the ephemerists: suddenly springing into being about some central personality, and as suddenly

dissolving to re-form themselves about another centre, when the first has lost its original attraction of novelty.

The government of English literature has always lain in the hands of what one may call, for want of a better term, the Ordinary Individual. An elucidation of this indefinite character may perhaps be effected by quotation, from Mr. Walpole himself, in his paper on *Reading*, and from Miss Clemence Dane's erudite exposition of the English novel form, entitled *Tradition and Hugh Walpole*.

"Almost all the great writers of the past" (says Mr. Walpole) "if they have not appealed to the man in the street, have won the interest of the plain man, who, to my way of thinking, is the man in the street plus a little culture."

" 'A little culture' " (objects Miss Dane) "is vague; but one may perhaps translate culture into equipment, the power to read easily, a certain instinct that warns him against insincerity, a sense of humour, a fair ear, a willing soul, a hungry imagination, and curiosity."

Not a word, you will observe, about literary sensitiveness or the power to discriminate between the rare and the commonplace. Without the intention of implying that the Ordinary Individual is illiterate, one is bound to assume that literature as literature means little to him, that he is to a great extent governed in his judgments by personal prejudice and the moral consideration which underlies the average English person's artistic pronouncements.

The supremacy of the Ordinary Individual has always been a matter galling to the intellectual extremists and mildly surprising to nations more selective in their literary taste. The simplicity, the to some extent naïveté of the great English novel has always surprised the French, who, as a nation, are more philosophic, less emotional in their literary tastes, more experimental and less hide-bound by tradition. They take their reading more seriously, are more cautious and at the same time more catholic in their judgments, and much more exigent in

their demands; for it must be admitted that the English Ordinary Individual takes his novel reading purely and simply as a means of relaxation, as a door of escape from business or domestic cares—which, when one comes to think of it, is an extremely reasonable interpretation of the function of the novel. He is, therefore, unlikely to make literary style his criterion of a book's importance. The novel, so far as he is concerned, will stand or fall by its power to transport him from the actual into an imaginary world. This obviously explains the popularity of the "thriller," the vogue of Edgar Wallace, and the enormously increased circulation of the Sunday papers. It is his delight to read of "moving accidents by field and flood," because his own life is, for the most part, drab, monotonous, and unrelieved by dramatic incident. At the same time, these "moving accidents" have to be linked up, in some form or other, with the conditions with which he is familiar, or they lose their value, so far as he is concerned; that is to say, they must be presented to him in a guise simple, credible, and within the scope of his own experience. The Ordinary Individual's imagination is no Pegasus, it is simply a very plain, straightforward, well-behaved hack, which will carry him so far and no farther; it jibs at the thickset, has a constitutional dislike for rails, and at the mere suggestion of cloudward soaring it sets its ears back, shows its teeth, and displays vicious tendencies wholly at odds with its outwardly mild and tractable disposition. It is at its happiest trotting sedately along the Row, swishing its tail as a sign of recognition at others of its own kind.

It is a curious fact that while the bulk of novel readers is acknowledged to be feminine, the responsibility of reviewing remains, for the most part, in masculine hands. It may, therefore, be said that the creation of a novelist's reputation lies with the male section of the community; and one thing is positive, that there are many more male subscribers to the libraries to-day than there were in the years before the war, and that the majority of these use their subscriptions solely for the purpose of getting out novels.

In the year 1914 the Ordinary Man found himself called upon to account for numberless crimes he had never heard of, much less committed; his gorge rose against the injustice, but he rushed in headlong to their expiation—and found himself, four years later, calling himself a fool, with the vaguest possible conception of where his folly began and where it ended. Obscurely he felt that he had been fighting for freedom, and found himself committed to a double bondage: for ideals—someone else's, not his own—and found himself in a world where ideals were three a penny. He knew that, so far as he was concerned, the real war had started here, now, in England. Heart-sick, brain-sick, body-sick, he shouldered arms once more, knowing that, like Childe Roland, "*he might go on; naught else remained to do.*" The world for which he had battled showed its resentment at his return by letting him see in every possible way that he was superfluous, that it had adjusted itself to his absence, that his reappearance disconcerted it and upset its organisation.

Was the mental outlook of such a man fitted to the task of literary arbitration? Could he be expected to bring back with him from Flanders the cool, clear, dispassionate attitude of mind that discriminates between bad and good style in literature? Would such a man be able to raise a laugh at an author who spent an hour in taking out a comma, and then an hour in putting it in again? His sense of humour was damaged: at least, it was broadened. He had learnt to laugh at things which, in 1913, would have turned his stomach, and to his ears there was something puerile in this finer, more pointed laughter. Above all, he sought stabilisation, and there seemed to him little stability in the finer, more flimsy, literary forms. We are not speaking, let us at once remind the reader, of the young man of intrinsic literary leanings, whose war experience caused him to belch forth a lava-flood of realism; but of the Ordinary Man, who, before 1914, had arrived at a keen appreciation of Wells and Bennett, at an occasional diversion at Bernard Shaw, but who chose a good detective yarn for his moments of relaxation; who liked Wells and Bennett because they gave him something

to think about, and Shaw because he flattered one's reason with a sense of superiority to his own; but who also carried somewhere at the back of his mind recollection of a good book of Locke's, called *The Beloved Vagabond*, which he picked out of a bookcase at a country house, and another called *Fortitude* that someone had recommended him to read, and which was good as well, and stuck in one's mind ("Blessed be all Failure and the ruin of every Earthly Hope. . . . Blessed be all Sorrows, Torments, Hardships, Endurances that demand Courage. . . . Blessed be these things—for of these things cometh the making of a Man": somewhere, in an old note-book, half-shamefacedly, he had copied those words, and that which came after: "Make of me a man—to be afraid of nothing . . . to be ready for everything—Love, Friendship, Success . . . to take them if they come . . . to care nothing if these things are not for me—Make me brave! Make me brave!" How little he, or the writer of those words, had known, in that day, their coming need!) and who fell back upon Thackeray and Scott with a conviction that the old ones took a great deal of beating.

Naturally, those men and women who had lived through the war period, either as active participators, or in the mean misery of souls condemned to inaction, rushed to the libraries for the anodyne which should cause them to forget their experiences. Their first experiments were, naturally, in the direction of the new-comers; the man sought for fellows of his own period, who must surely have something to say that was worth reading. Perhaps from them he would be able to learn what it had really been about. The first of the war books was long in coming, for the wary publishers knew the wisdom of allowing the first poignancy to wear away before stirring the memories of the public. It came at last, and the man read, with a feeling of growing disillusion, the first chapters: skipping from page to page in the hope of discovering some revealing sentence, some compensating philosophy that would help to justify his own contribution to an act of world-folly. He found, instead, page upon page of photographic reproduction of conditions with which he was

familiar to the point of nausea. Instead of compensation he found reminders of acts of bestiality at which his soul shuddered with shame; his primary feeling was one of betrayal. For the Ordinary Man is a decent individual, with a deep prejudice against matters that tend to the degradation of mankind. The preservation of the illusion of the integrity of the race—particularly of the English race—is as much a part of his religion as his belief in God and in the virtue of his wife. He may not be able to scale the heights of—

*“Now God be thanked Who has matched us with His hour,
And caught our youth, and wakened us from sleeping—”*

But he feels instinctively that

*“Honour has come back as a king to earth,
And paid his subjects with a royal wage;
And Nobleness walks in our ways again,
And we have come into our heritage—”*

—whilst idealistic to the point of folly, is a decenter epilogue to that which is past than these post-mortem examinations of war conditions. It may be sentimental, but his instinct is to lay a flower on the corpse, rather than stick a scalpel into it for purposes of an autopsy. It was foul, bloody and bestial enough while it lasted; now, for God's sake, and for the sake of the younger generation growing up around us, whom our instinct is to protect, let it alone; a little romance can do no harm at this stage.

Romance! We have arrived at the very thing for which the Ordinary Individual is seeking, without knowing that for which he seeks. If you said “Romance” to him he would be off at a tangent. His parents were not afraid to acknowledge it; he is aghast at its very name.

So our Ordinary Individual carries the experiment a little farther; even if one avoids the war writers, there is a vast field of young authors to draw upon; instinctively he—or she—turns towards youth for what he is seeking. Shaw has lost his

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head, there is too much exhibitionism about him nowadays to recommend him to people whose tastes have developed beyond the merely sensational; H. G. Wells has never quite lived up to *Kipps* and *Tono Bungay*—*Mr. Britling* was a bothering piece of work that one skimmed while on leave, and which left one without any particular desire to read more; Arnold Bennett—glorious, of course, but one has read everything of his—if he could only turn out a book every six months!¹ And then would one have too much of him? Masses of books by jejune young people—young men—especially—with a social bias; farragos of egomania.

“I’ll tell you what; what’s that fellow who wrote *Fortitude*, and another awfully good thing called *The Duchess of Wrexhe*, doing nowadays? He didn’t seem the kind to peter out with the war. What had he to say about it? That should be worth reading.”

The young lady behind the desk languidly pushes a book called *The Secret City* towards the enquirer.

“That’s quite one of his old ones,” she says, paying more attention to her nails than to the Ordinary Individual. “It was published in 1919.”

Forty-eight hours later he is back again, with the book in his hand.

“That’s all right,” he says. “Though I’m not sure what it’s all about, it’s a bit involved for me—I never was in Russia. What else have you of his?”

“*The Cathedral’s* out,” yawns the languid young lady. “It’s in great demand.”

“Well, keep it for me when it comes in,” says the Ordinary Individual; and a week or so later he carries it home in triumph.

Within a month he has read them all: all since *The Duchess of Wrexhe*. *The Dark Forest*, *The Green Mirror*, a splendid sort of books about kids, called *Jeremy*, and another, *The Golden Scarecrow*, *The Captives*, a book of short stories called *The Thirteen Travellers*, quite the best of which is about a fellow

¹ This chapter was written before the death of Arnold Bennett.

called Matcham, who came back from the front thinking he was Nobody: and *The Young Enchanted*.

He is not sure what it is that fascinates him about them. They are not exciting, but one cannot put them down. They are *real*, real in a way the war novels are not real. One knows that ordinary, decent people act and talk like that—people who are not bewitched by the war devil into the awful caricature of their real selves. The women are like one's mother and sisters—if one searches, somewhat sheepishly, and with a shade of disappointment, for one's sweethearts, that can't be helped; one does not precisely fall in love with Hugh Walpole's women, they are too simple, too direct, too free of the caprice which constitutes the lure of the sex, but they would make splendid friends. And the men are the fellows you meet at the club or at business or among one's elderly relatives. Surely this is what is properly meant by realism, this recognisable presentation of people one knows and goes about with.

The Ordinary Individual is not sufficiently analytical to discover the elements which contribute to his enjoyment of Hugh Walpole's books: reverence for tradition, for background, for the background behind the background, for venerable things and people, the belief in the soul's supremacy, in the fundamental goodness of mankind, in wholesome human relationships, in the equipoise between the body and mind of man, in chivalrous instincts, in feminine virtue, in the courage of both sexes, in the Unseen, in God: with a sufficient acknowledgment of the power of villainy, of malign forces, occultism and diabolical interference to acquit Mr. Walpole of the charge of a foolish idealism. He simply sees in these books a summary of the things he believed in before the war and desires to believe again, and, without understanding why, he sets Mr. Walpole down as a great writer, in which his judgment, for once, is not at fault.

The stuff of romance is the stuff of immortality. The great writer is the writer who can present romance to the Ordinary Individual in terms that he can appreciate: not scaring him away with dragons and ogres which he knows do not exist, nor

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insulting his intelligence with fairies whose supposed existence he has resented ever since his mother made him shout "Yes!" in answer to the perennial question of Peter Pan; but telling him a fairy story in the language of plain, everyday life. The demand for romance is as strong to-day as it was when the saga of *Beowulf* was invented, and only varies in its form of interpretation. Now, as then, it contains the contrasted elements of Virtue and Vice, with the triumph of the former; now, as then, it demands the intervention of Unseen Powers. Its interpreter requires a profound belief in the truth of his narrative. His only handicap is that, in an age of sophistication, he is obliged to cloak his romanticism in an assumption of reality. The old story-tellers laboured under no such difficulty; at the words "At a wave of her wand, they were turned into swine" no one batted an eyelash. In the present day your Romantic must disguise his witch as a Duchess of Wrexhe, his ogre as a Man With Red Hair, if he wishes to convince his audience. His prince forcing his way into the enchanted tower must be dressed up as young Henry Trenchard, groping his way up a ladder in a Soho yard. Fairyland, even disguised as Trelliss, causes the Ordinary Individual to gulp and blink his eyes, until he is reassured that even here Mr. Hugh Walpole will not betray and then desert him!

And it takes a Very Great Writer indeed to force upon his public a four-volume historical saga dealing with a part of England so remote that only ten per cent. of his readers have more than a casual acquaintance with it; and not only to force it upon them, but to know that, having produced *Rogue Herries*, they are anxiously waiting for its promised sequel, and that when *Judith Paris* is on the bookstalls, people are asking, "And when is *The Fortress* coming along?"

The consensus of literary opinion in England will always lie, as it has always lain, with the sober and God-fearing section of the community: with the traditionalists, who have little in common with a feverish and experimental post-war society which has its own standards of judgment: for whom there are other

gods, other formulæ, and a (probably) more advanced taste in literature: who will now and again fling a best-seller with the force of a bomb into the literary tabernacle, or produce a novel whose merit will command the respect of all but the most prejudiced of the traditionalists. But there is little question of these, either now or hereafter, being accepted as representative of the literary output of the period. National opinion will smother, as it has always smothered, individual achievement. This is a pity, because it is a menace to progress; but there are certain things which the Englishman, rightly or wrongly, will have in his great literature, and these things (which I summarised a paragraph or two ago) are not the product of a single age, but are a part of the English literary tradition.

The position of Hugh Walpole in modern letters is a peculiar one; one without a present-day parallel—for so young a man. It is a position which might lie heavily on shoulders less tempered to responsibility than Mr. Walpole's, and yet one that readers of his *Wooden Horse* might have foretold so long ago as 1909, if any had been found rash enough to base prophecy on a first novel. It would indeed argue an almost incredible naïveté on the part of the reader, were he to descry the Olympian laurels on the brow of a young man of twenty-two, with a single novel to his credit. Yet even in that beginning a singular sobriety of outlook marks the creation of the character of Robin Trojan. His egotistical and conceited figure is not a young man's image of youth. We are shown Robin through the eyes of one who has already learnt the values of things, who realises the essential triviality of Robin's grubby little adventure, which he—Robin—exaggerates into a tragedy. The relations of Robin with his family—particularly with his father—are described with a justice and balance beyond Mr. Walpole's (then) years; the only point wherein he fails is in the creation of Mary Bethel, and even that is only partial failure.

This sobriety has persisted, has broadened and deepened, in the succession of his novels. It is a quality, one might say, that is hardly likely to recommend itself to post-war England, which

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has brought flippancy to a fine art in its "popular" fiction, or reached out, in the persons of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, towards literary forms which appear positively fantastic beside the unperturbed solemnity of Mr. Walpole's style. Set *Orlando* beside *Wintersmoon*. Both are novels of tradition—not in the sense of Miss Clemence Dane's literary dissection, but in the sense of concerning themselves with characters deep-rooted in the tradition of their race. Yet one might as well set a unicorn and a racehorse side by side. Apart from their breeding, the two are incomparable to one another: the one a creature reared in the moonlight of an enchanted forest, the other bred from generations of English stock. Virginia Woolf's romance has got the bit in its teeth, and bolts headlong down the starry firmament, while Hugh Walpole's set the English turf ringing with the sound of its hoofs, but is never for one instant out of control of its rider, who is, of course, the Ordinary Individual. And for one man who cares for *Orlando* there are fifty who admire *Wintersmoon* and find in it the reflection of their own lives. The looking-glass test is the first which the Ordinary Individual applies to the modern novel, and it is one in which Mr. Walpole's books never fail. So one is forced to the conclusion that this so-much-vaunted post-war generation, with its eruptive views on life in general, is still in the minority, which is possibly the reason why it is so noisy, and forces itself so continually upon one's attention.

And as for the other class of post-war writer, whose young women make a habit of sleeping with young men whom they have not the slightest intention of marrying, or even becoming engaged to—it is not to be supposed that because they do not enter into Mr. Walpole's pages he does not recognise their existence. Who but a prig would not? And Mr. Walpole is at least a hundred miles from being a prig. It is simply a case of the body-lice over again; while recognising that these promiscuous young people are a commonplace of post-war society (or so their literature would lead us to assume), Mr. Walpole does not feel that they are of importance, and therefore, like a

good artist, he keeps them out of the way—wherein, very likely, he is wrong, but he is at least consistent with his romanticism. Part of his success lies in the fact that the mirror which he holds up to contemporary society is, on the whole, a flattering one; that he presents his characters to their originals, less as they are, than as they would like to think they might be. Behind the history of their ignobilities lies the poor, pathetic intent of their aspirations. *Vide meliora proboque, deteriora sequor* is written on the brow of the majority of Mr. Walpole's characters, just as it is written on the brow of the average decent person. Self-deception is at the root of the majority of their failures: not the inability to see themselves as they are, but the refusal to see themselves as they are. Brandon and Ronder are the two archetypes of such self-deception. Instinctively the reader feels that this is right, that this is actually the way things happen; because of such easily understood and recognisable characters, he accepts the two archetypes of Good and Evil in Harmer John and The Man with Red Hair. These are exaggerations of Mr. Walpole's usual character drawing; they stand out among the rest of his creations like a beam from a lighthouse, like the morbid glow from a pit of hell. In them his romanticism has free rein; yet he interprets it, even in their cases, in terms that are intelligible to our friend, the Ordinary Individual.

In naming the characters in three of his earlier novels Trojan, Maradick and Olva Dune Mr. Walpole nailed his colours to the masthead. The dictionary definition of romance is "that which passes beyond the limits of real life." Here we seem to glimpse the first traces of Mr. Walpole's "dædal optimism"—certainly "a denial of tasteless commonplace." When it is well known that the only credible class of nomenclature in modern fiction is that which includes such names as Crawshaw, Williams and Ramsbottom, the daring of his action appears in full; and in naming his historic mansion The House of the Flutes instead of Granby Manor he strains the credulity of the reader even further in the direction of cracking-point. Here indeed Mr. Walpole breaks away from the literary tradi-

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tion of his beloved Trollope, pulls a face at naturalism, and betrays himself, once for all, as the romantic. But having christened his Trojans and Maradicks, he proceeds to seize us by the scruff of our necks, to force our belief in them, in spite of their fantastic labels.

But having declared his literary politics in these unmistakable terms, Mr. Walpole proceeds modestly to take refuge behind a reticence of expression typically British. A thing which is bound to strike the reader familiar with modern tricks of literary expression is Hugh Walpole's passionate devotion to the literal. You may find in him no hyperbole, no exaggeration, no irony. He used the most literal language to express his most romantic moments. He makes no use of the legitimate tricks of the novelist; he is possibly the most straightforward of present-day writers. It is as though he were to say, "I am a Romantic, and I am not ashamed to acknowledge it, but I consider my romanticism my own affair. I do not desire to thrust it upon you, or to cause you to forsake your creeds for my own. You may read me without fear; you will not require a dictionary to understand me, nor will I strain your imagination with simile or your reasoning power with metaphor. Nevertheless, you will perceive quite clearly as you get to know me that I am a Romantic, and I am prepared to share my romanticism with you on your own terms."

A deceptively reassuring overture, which, however, does little to prepare us for the bursts of sheer sensuous beauty which suddenly interrupt his ardour as story-teller. Sometimes it is only a sentence:

"So thick a glow suffused the air that it was as though strangely coloured fruit, purple and orange and amethyst, hung glittering against the pale yellow sky, and the road running up the hill was like pale wax."¹

The spontaneity of the phrase is evidenced by the repetition of the word *pale*, for which, in revision, the stylist would surely

¹ *The Cathedral.*

have substituted another in the first instance; but Mr. Walpole is not a stylist. He does not believe in making his muse jump through hoops. A curiously youthful sincerity blazes through every page of his twenty-nine books.

Sometimes, however, this sensitiveness to beauty breaks out with such vehemence that Mr. Walpole has to surrender himself to it for a succession of paragraphs:

“ . . . and instantly in the shabby place there were blazing such treasures as Harkness had never set eyes on before.

“ Not very many as numbers went—some dozen shelves in all—but gleaming, glittering, shining, flinging out their flashes of purple and amber and gold, here crystalline, now deeply wine-coloured, pink with the petals of the rose, white with the purity of the rising moon. There was jewelry here that seemed to move with its own independent life before Harkness’s eyes—Jaipur enamel of transparent red and green, lovely patterns with thick, long strips of enamel on a ground of bright gold, over which, while still hot from the furnace, an openwork pattern of gold had been pressed; large rough turquoises set in silver; Chinese work of carved ivory and jade, cap ornaments exquisitely worked, a cap of a Chinese emperor with its embroidered gold dragon and its crown of pearls. Then the inlaid Chinese feather work, and at the sight of these tears of pleasure came into Harkness’s eyes; cells made as though for cloisonné enamel, and into these are daintily affixed tiny fragments of kingfisher feather. Colours of blue, green and mauve here blend and tone into one another miraculously, and the effect of all is a glittering sheen of gold and blue. There was one tiny fish, barely half an inch long, and there were thirty cells on the body, each with its separate piece of feather. Chinese enamel buttons and clasps, nail-guards beautifully ornamented, Japanese hair combs marvellously wrought in laqueur, horn, gold lac on wood, wood with ivory appliques and stained ivory.

“ Then the Netsukés! Had any one in the world such

lovely things! With the ivory and its colour richly toned with age, the metal ones showing a glorious patina. The sword guards—made of various metals and alloys and gold and silver, the metal so beautifully finished that it had the rich texture of old lace.

“There was then the Renaissance jewelry, pieces lying like fragments of sky, of peach tree in bloom, of cherry and apple, a lovely pendant parrot enamelled in natural colours, a beautiful ship pendant of Venetian workmanship, an Italian earring, formed of a large irregular pear-shaped pearl in a gold setting, a Cinquecento jewel—an emerald lizard set with a baroque pearl holding an emerald in its mouth.

“Eighteenth-century glory. Gold studs with little skeletons on silk, covered with glass and set in gold. Initials of fine gold with a ground of plaited hair, this edged with blue and covered with faceted glass on crystal and the border of garnets. A pair of earrings, paintings in gusaille mounted in gold. A brooch set with garnets. A French vinaigrette enamelled in panels of green on a gold and white ground.

“Loveliest of anything yet seen, a sixteenth-century cameo portrait of Lucius Verius cut in a dark onyx. The enamel was green, with little white ‘peas,’ and small diamonds were set in each pod.”¹

Farewell Trollopian puritanism! One has to go to some such passage as:

“Whose wings, like strange transparent talc, rose high above
his hawk-faced head,
Painted with silver and with red and ribbed with rods of
Oreicalch,”

or to Des Esseintes choosing the jewels which are to encrust the carapace of his tortoise, or to *Dorian Gray*, or to the childlike French of *Salome* for anything approaching a parallel.

“*J’ai des onyx semblables aux prunelles d’une morte. . . .
J’ai des saphirs grands comme des œufs et bleus comme des fleurs*

¹ *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair.*

bleues. La mer erre dedans, et la lune ne vient jamais troubler le bleu de ses flots."

The difference is, of course, that while such passages as these last are tainted with an æstheticism which one feels to be *faisandée*, Mr. Walpole's word poem has the rapture and the vigour of youth. There is no æstheticism in his cataloguing—he makes use of trite word combinations like "glorious patina" and "marvellously wrought" and "daintily affixed": he is even guilty of changing his tense in the middle of his description: he simply cannot stop to bother about his verbs and his adjectives and adverbs, because the beauty is pouring out of him like a torrent; he cannot, for the time being, control it. He is no *peignoiré* decadent, surveying these splendours from beneath the drooped eyelid of moral and spiritual satiety; one has no sort of feeling that, having observed them, "*contrairement à son habitude, il avait appétit et il trempait ses roties enduites d'un extraordinaire beurre dans une tasse de thé, un impeccable mélange de Si-a-Fayoune, de Mo-you-tann et de Khansky des thés jaunes, venus de Chine en Russie par d'exceptionnelles caravanes.*" There are no "exceptional caravans" about Mr. Hugh Walpole, despite his romanticism. In a moment he has plunged back into his story-telling, which, although tempted for a moment by Crispin's Bracquemonds and Meryons, he sweeps forward to its climax. For this distillation of material beauty takes place, one might think a little wastefully, in a book which Miss Clemence Dane has stigmatised as a shocker; and I am inclined to think that part of its delight arises from finding it in such a setting. It seems to emphasise its spontaneity, its essential Hugh-Walpoleism. And unless one pays attention to the Crispin collection and to Lord Richard Beaminster's fan cabinet one is only half acquainted with the real Walpole; Walpole the sensualist is inseparable from Walpole the moralist and Walpole the delineator of social conditions.

At the beginning of this essay I referred to God as the Leading Character or Hero of Hugh Walpole's novels. Just as in the tragedy of *Julius Cæsar* the spirit of the dead man governs

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the whole play, although his corporeal presence is disposed of in the first scene of the third act in a five-act drama, so Mr. Walpole's Hero, who never makes His appearance at all, save, briefly and questionably, to Archdeacon Brandon, on Friday evening, June 18th of the year 1897, at about half-past six o'clock, dominates the twenty-four Walpole novels up to the inception of the Herries saga—which is other matter, and to which one has to bring a totally different set of standards. Now, is that not the act of a romantic?—to make one's dominant figure an Invisible Presence, never within shot of mortal eye, but directing the scene as surely as a competent stage-manager: arranging the exits and entrances, reassuring the nervous player before his appearances and reprimanding the careless one, himself master of the scene, although others, more conspicuous, may reap the glory in the eye of the unthinking audience? Without him the whole scene would crumble, the artists totter about in dire confusion, the man on the curtain would miss his cue, the orchestra its beat, and the electricians envelop the stage in floods of inappropriate light or gloom.

Your average author is jealous for his puppets; he keeps the Stage-Manager well in the background; it is his pleasure to delude himself and the reader with the sense of his omnipotence; according to him, he and he only is in charge of his characters, who derive their direction from the instructions he whispers into their ears. Hugh Walpole brings into the wings his Supreme Character, and, metaphorically speaking, washes his hands of responsibility. In doing so, he discounts his own artistry in keeping his audience in perpetual awareness of his Character, Who, to my mind, is least credible in that *soi-disant* moment of manifestation to Archdeacon Brandon, who, of all Mr. Walpole's creations, is least fitted, morally and spiritually, to behold Him. In *The Cathedral*, paradoxically, we have less sense of the presence of God than in any of the other novels; because He is obscured, as Mr. Walpole intends He should be, behind the old joss-house, the old museum of form and ceremonial observance, which is the Cathedral itself.

"Suddenly Foster flung out, 'Do you believe in God, Canon Ronder?'"

"'I think,' said Ronder, 'the fact that I'm in the position I'm in——'"

"'Nonsense,' interrupted Foster, 'that's anybody's answer. You don't look a spiritual man.'"

"'I'm fat, if that's what you mean,' said Ronder, smiling 'That's my misfortune.'"¹

The Character is most vivid, perhaps as the Friend of *The Golden Scarecrow*. But, in whatever degree It manifests Itself, one seldom loses sight of It, for It forms the axis round which the main thought, conversation and action of the rest revolve: without which *Prelude to Adventure* would never have been written, *The Duchess of Wrex* could never have been conceived the Russian novels would lose their continuity, *The Cathedral* its *raison d'être*, *The Captives* its struggle, *The Portrait of a Man with Red Hair* its diabolism, *Harmer John* its principal human character, *Wintersmoon* the happy issue out of all its afflictions (save those of poor Rosalind Seddon). These are the books wherein one comes most surely face to face with Mr Walpole's Character, and which one cannot in any circumstances imagine with the Character removed. The infinite variety of Its interpretations ranges from the Beaminster and Purefoy viewpoint, which is essentially the viewpoint of the old traditional classes, the classes which, so to speak, made a corner in God, and, while believing that His main preoccupation was with their own affairs, consented to ladle Him out in liberal doses (from bottles marked clearly Beaminster or Purefoy) to the deserving poor: through the fierce and militant viewpoint, lit by the flames of hell fire, of the Warlocks and the lambent positivism of Harmer John, to that of Ernest Henry Wilberforce:

"Then it had come to be that the Friend came only a night, came at that moment when the nurse was gone, when

¹ *The Cathedral*.

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the room was dark, and the possible Beasts—the First Beast, the Second Beast and the Third Beast—began to creep amongst those cool, grey shadows in the hollow of the room. He always came then, was there with His arm about Ernest Henry, His great body, His large, firm hands—all so reassuring that the Beasts might do their worst, and nothing could come of it. He brought with Him, indeed, so much more than Himself—brought a whole world of recollected wonders, of all that other time when Ernest Henry had other things to do, other disciplines, other triumphs, other defeats and other glories.”¹

And we are shown Olva Dune fleeing It in the semblance of the Hound of Heaven, and Semyonov seeing in It only a barrier to his possession of Marie Ivanovna, and old Sir Jeremy Trojan, on the verge of meeting It face to face, buoying up his courage with the portrait of a black-haired dancer. But always, always It is there, keeping one in continual remembrance of Itself by its fugitive appearances, which seem to promise more love and knowledge later on. And one gathers optimism from these encounters—which is precisely the thing which the modern novelist, taking him on the whole, denies one.

In *De Profundis* occurs this paragraph:

“Indeed, that is the charm about Christ, when all is said: he is just like a work of art. He does not really teach one anything, but by being brought into his presence one becomes something. And everybody is predestined to his presence. Once at least in his life each man walks with Christ to Emmaus.”

It seems to me that through reading Hugh Walpole’s books one has a very fair chance of becoming something. It seems to me that this, consciously or unconsciously acknowledged by the Ordinary Individual, accounts for Mr. Walpole’s position in English letters to-day: which in itself—I have tried to avoid this statement—is surely proof positive of the triumph of Romance.

¹ *The Golden Scarecrow.*

CHAPTER TWO

BIOGRAPHICAL

THE title of this chapter is bound to raise misgivings in the mind of the reader, as it does in my own: for how can one pretend to cover half a century of a man's crowded life within such petty limits as these, imposed by a book which is dedicated to other interests? The life of Hugh Walpole, adequately written, would divide itself into a Victorian, an Edwardian and a neo-Georgian section, each with its individual bouquet, its so personal and characteristic atmosphere—so richly tempting to the biographer, so impossible to indicate within the scope of such a summary as this, perforce, is doomed to be. It is to be hoped that one day Mr. Walpole will assume the autobiographical task, for, apart from personal interest, there are few modern writers so equipped to write the literary saga of the three reigns, which have witnessed so many and such exciting developments of literary form, are so rich in literary personalities, and so replete with encouragement and advantage for the young writer. To have lived through the Victorian twilight and the Canopian illumination of the reign of Edward VII into the synthetic glitter of the post-war years is a privilege only to be fully appreciated by the artists and the writers of the three epochs.

It seems a pity that one cannot at this point reproduce some brightly blazoned genealogical tree, all hung with little painted shields and engrossed with musical, antique-sounding names, to link up the starry points of Hugh Walpole's descent with the present bearer of the name. One gathers that he does not quite share his grandfather's "legitimate pride in an ancestry which

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went back to a Sir John de Walpole who lived in the reign of Henry III, whose eldest son, Sir Henry de Walpole, in the manors of Walpole and Houton in the county of Norfolk, followed his feudal lord Edward I on an expedition against the King of France; and in later years produced Sir Robert Walpole, Prime Minister of George I and George II and father of Horace Walpole." Hugh Walpole will admit, with a comfortable and vague indifference, that there are one or two lives between himself and the barony of Oxford. If there seems something a little inconsistent between this indifference to personal tradition and the loving care which has traced the ramifications of the Herries descent—not to mention the constant preoccupation with genealogy which crops up through the Walpole novels—it must be remembered that inconsistency is part of the charm of the romantic temperament. Brooding on one's forebears is an occupation which might lose a man "the common touch," and of Hugh Walpole one might employ that contradiction in terms, "aristocratic democracy," which the reader, bearing in mind the intellectual aristocracy, the sympathetic democracy of Mr. Walpole's writings, may puzzle out for himself.

From *The Crystal Box*, a little, privately printed volume which might form the basis of the autobiography Mr. Walpole should some day give us, one gathers that at the age of eight he was not so indifferent, deciding, with the help of a friend, that he was the Rightful Earl, kept out of his Norfolk estates by the machinations of a rascally uncle; an interesting assumption based upon the discovery, in an old writing-case given to Hugh by the said uncle, of "a letter, yellow and faded, covered with close writing of which we could decipher not one word." (The italics are the biographer's.) Well, many a claim to a lofty lineage has been based on proofs as flimsy. The Rightful Earl went, temporarily, robed in the purple; to-day he is more interested in the fact that the name of Horace Walpole twinkles in the galaxy that gave him birth, and, more strongly still, in his inheritance, on the distaff side, of a small strain of Northumbrian blood,

descending from the Forsters of Northumberland, the same Forsters who produced the well-beloved Dorothy.

The history of his immediate ancestry is well in the romantic tradition, as must appear even in so foreshortened a view as is necessarily presented by this present summary. The grandfather, an officer in the English army, fell victim—one can hardly express it otherwise—in middle age to religious conversion: resigned his commission, took holy orders, and in due time became Rector of Balderton, near the Norfolk family seat. From all accounts, the arrival of Mr. Walpole in the light-hearted—not to say lawless—parish of Balderton was more suggestive of the descent of the Assyrian than of the appointment of a spiritual pastor. The cohorts of Mr. Walpole, however, were not gleaming with purple and gold, for like many clerical families they were poor; but poverty was no deterrent to the energies of the newly appointed Rector. He was ultra-everything: ultra-Christian, ultra-ritualist, ultra-disciplinarian: he interpreted the teachings of the Church in the terms of the British army, and drilled the startled parishioners into submission to religious forms they neither liked nor understood. He was, in fact, the perfect exemplification of the familiar saying that there is no zeal like the zeal of the proselyte. Unfortunately for his family, he carried his theories of absolute authority into the home, and the story of the disciplining of his three sons would read like sheer melodrama to-day.

It is curious to observe that, in spite of his own experience, Mr. Walpole has destined the most delicate of his sons, George Henry Somerset Walpole, to the army. The prospect must have been one of horror to the gentle, sensitive, essentially spiritual boy, who had emerged unscathed from the dubious morals and manners of the cheap school to which the poverty of the family condemned him, and who might well have earned the approval of his stern parent by his deep devotion to his father's church and his submission to its influence.

At Trinity College, Cambridge, this mild and gentle youth found courage to make his decision; a decision which curiously

enough failed to arouse the sympathy in his father which the young man might well have anticipated.

To shorten matters—through the influence of a junior Fellow of his college, G. H. S. Walpole went to Truro, and found the justification of his act of independence amid that ardent company of young men gathered about Bishop Benson, who had raised his visionary torch in the new Cathedral, to which, after a suitable interval (he was ordained in the year 1878), Walpole was appointed Precentor.

Here, in Truro, began the friendship with the Benson family, which rich legacy, in later years, he was to hand down to his son Hugh; and here budded and blossomed a romance so tender and so lovely that one fears, by some inadvertent touch of clumsiness, to destroy its fragile bloom. For here he met Miss Barham—"as pretty as paint and as sweet as an angel," to quote her son's description, "knowing less than nothing about everything," which is to say that she shared with her young lover that touching and essentially Victorian form of innocence which implied a total ignorance of all matters in which, as a matter of course, the modern child of ten is instructed.

"I have a little yellow photograph" (writes Hugh Walpole, in that short memoir of his mother, so exquisitely written that one dare not, if one could, add a word to it) "and from this, both prettier and shyer than any girl is allowed to be to-day, she looks out into a world that can, she knows, be terrifying." *How* terrifying they probably found out, poor innocents, upon their honeymoon, which took place on board ship, *en route* for New Zealand! They had been married in the Cathedral, on September 12th, 1882, and he had accepted the incumbency of St. Mary's Church—afterwards to become the Cathedral—at Auckland.

The wind howled, the waves boiled and the ship rolled; it was a frightful experience. He had once crossed the Channel to France, and she had never been off dry land! Who shall dare to describe the feelings of the so recently Miss Mildred Helen Barham, reft from her happy, crowded home, from all the dear delights of her Cornish society, from the thrills and innocent

gaiety of county balls, from the lanes which in spring lay deep in violets and the sea which lay calm as a sapphire in the embrace of the Cornish coves? She was brought up, writes her son, in the very sanctity of Victorian domesticity. Her father was the principal doctor in Truro, related to every family in Cornwall, and cousin to the Barham of *The Ingoldsby Legends*. In those days Truro, like every other small, isolated community, was a "nest of relations." What epic of love and devotion lies behind the history of this fledgeling's flight from the nest?

They had a terrible passage, and then they arrived in New Zealand, where they had a terrible time. At least, it may not have been terrible at all: but to these gently bred, gently reared young people—even the vicissitudes of his boyhood, severe as these had been, had had some sort of rooting in civilisation—the New Zealanders appeared as savages. Their intent may have been good, but they terrified Mrs. Walpole, and even he, at first, was at a loss in dealing with the almost primitive conditions, of thought and action, into which they found themselves plunged. One can picture her, offering her shy and delicate courtesy to these seeming barbarians: one can imagine her, shrinking from rebuffs, into the casket of herself. During the remainder of her life Mrs. Walpole suffered from the effects of this numbing experience; she had lost confidence in herself; the impossibility of believing that people could really wish to know her produced a mental condition which psychologists, in those days, had not begun to classify under the catch-phrase of an "inferiority complex," which shadowed her associations with strangers, so that only the few who were her intimates knew the full richness of that staunch and charming character.

Loyalty to her husband—himself too occupied in taming his savages to lend her the support she needed—carried her through this painful period of her life, and the birth of her first child, Hugh, in the first year of their establishment at Auckland, must have brought her a deep personal comfort, and made it easier to bear with misunderstanding and misinterpretation—for both of which, with characteristic humility, she blamed herself.

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With the birth of Hugh (March 13th, 1884), the centre of our interest shifts: it is no longer necessary to trace the wanderings of the Walpole family to New York, to Durham, to Lambeth, and finally to Edinburgh—of which, in 1910, Canon Walpole was offered the bishopric: for one of these places, New York, does not concern Hugh at all, and another, Edinburgh, concerns him very little, because, in those days, *The Wooden Horse* and *Maradick at Forty* had been written, *Mr. Perrin and Mr. Traill* was in the writing, and the career of a young man of letters had absorbed Mrs. Walpole's first-born, who had established himself in Chelsea and was living romance as fast as he was writing it.

But one cannot bid a temporary farewell to Mrs. Walpole without quoting the final sentence of her son's memoir:

"She was a very great lady of stupendous courage; she never knew how many people she made happy and proud."

One feels that De La Mare's *An Epitaph* was written for such a one.

At the age of nine and a half (three years after his father accepted a professorship in the General Theological Seminary of New York) Hugh Walpole was sent home to England.

He, it will be remembered, was the child of that fearful passage to New Zealand, the product of something like a nervous frenzy on the part of his young parents; one would hardly look for the qualities in him which might be expected from a child conceived in more normal circumstances. One would hardly assume that Hugh, at nine, was one of those hardy, hearty children of the New World that, given such parents and a different rearing, he might have become. He was the child of his parents' anxieties and their struggles, although, with their establishment in New York, their hardships had ended.

He was, at nine, a child of deep sensitiveness, of a torturous imagination, of a thousand fears, of a passionate desire for approval, and an unchildlike and desperate gratitude when it was awarded. It is possible that none of these traits manifested

themselves in a positive degree while he was at home; else it is unthinkable that Mrs. Walpole, always tender and devoted to her children, would not have challenged the paternal authority which despatched him, for his soul's good, to the school in whose dark soil they sprang up like mushrooms—one of those establishments of which it is convenient to say, "Oh, there aren't any places like that nowadays." Laying this flattering unction to his soul, one can nevertheless imagine the modern parent poring a trifle uneasily over the first chapter of *The Crystal Box*, and wondering exactly what does go on in John's dormitory o' nights—regarding which John is the last person to apply to for enlightenment; for (such is the queer, heart-rending loyalty of little boys) Hugh suffered every form of torment and abuse known to the prep. school for two years before the return of his parents resulted in their shocked discovery of the pitiable little creature their son had become. Poor Pomfret-Walpole—whose disconsolate figure slouches across the corner of a page for no other purpose than to disclose Mr. Perrin's talent for the age-old cat-and-mouse game! Poor Pomfret-Walpole—so futile, so muddle-headed, so dirty!

For two years he died a thousand deaths—probably nine hundred and ninety more than the average, unimaginative boy would have done; he knew the torture of physical pain (oh, the bright ingenuity of those "games" devised by the bigger boys to test the "courage" of the smaller ones! The malign inventiveness they bring to bear on the humiliation of the helpless juniors!); he knew the torture of mental suggestion. It took, he says, one month at this gem among prep. schools to turn him into a little terrified sycophant, "dirty in body and mind," so nerve-ridden that any sudden noise sent his "heart into his cranium," and, worst of all, it undermined the intelligence which this, up to that time, carefully trained child had brought to school with him, and made him a muddle-headed incompetent.

"Loneliness, grime, filth, cowardice, lies, and lechery—and ten years old at that!"

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Into this is tumbled the Rightful Earl of Orford (*soi-disant*), whose sanity, one may assume, hung on that slender thread which to the Realist spells madness—his dreams! A friend—what the discovery of a *friend* must have meant to the lonely and frightened small boy is worth a paragraph to itself—called Jumbo, shared his unhappiness and his dreams. It was Jumbo who shared the discovery of the letter, and who decided straightway, on the strength of the pages he could not read, that Hugh was the Rightful Earl: and it was Jumbo who, with the uttermost artfulness and precaution, with all the hush-hushes and don't-tells essential to the conveyance of matters of state, circulated the news through the school, so that (small boys being, according to Mr. Walpole, the greatest snobs in the universe) the Rightful Earl enjoyed a precarious sort of prestige, and was even asked to remember some of his torturers when he came into his estate.

Jumbo and the headmaster's wife, for whom he professed in his soul's secrecy a Young-Woodley-ish devotion, easy to understand, for she was young, pretty and gentle, and talked to the little boys—little Goths!—about the moon and stars when she visited the dormitories at night, were two of the principal alleviations of his lot through this grimy period—about which, to-day, he is inclined to take the healthy, normal point of view: he *ought* to have stood up for himself, he *ought*, like Jumbo, to have flown like a lion at his tormentors and “l'arnt 'em” to touch him, he *ought* not to have been such a sentimental tearful, little silly. For my part, I fail to see any reason why he *ought* to have done anything but precisely what he did; our actions, at the age of nine or ten, are conditioned, not by our perception of moral issues (unless we are horrid Little Erics), but by forces of whose existence neither we nor our companions have ever heard: little matters like heredity and pre-natal influence, which are naturally overlooked by a strapping young person of thirteen, in temporary ascendancy over a Pomfret-Walpole. No; it is only in one of those amiable moods of “attitude,” which one can so easily overlook because Hugh

Walpole is, of all men, the most utterly guiltless of "attitude," that he comes out with his list of oughts—and even then he sets them in inverted commas. He knows that there are certain things in his present life, certain inefficiencies, certain withdrawals, that trace directly back to those two unhappy years at S——.

The third alleviation of his lot was, of course, his Kingdom of the Mind. Oh, what a place it must have been! Perhaps, when he brought it to school, it had a certain pretence at system, a certain sense of cause and effect, a balance, a definite image or two, a sort of dazzle and glimmer and breathless beauty that could resolve itself in a minute into something as diabolical as only the mind of a child can be diabolical in its inventions! At all events, it was very clean, and the winds of heaven blew sweetly through it. Poor Pomfret-Walpole! The moths got into your Kingdom during those terrible years at S——, and mice and black-beetles and rats and heaven knows what beside, till at a peep you shuddered and hid your dizzied eyes. Nevertheless, in spite of chaos, in spite of dust and debris, and the endless, heart-sickening search for things that had got mislaid, you knew that somewhere, under the rags, under the grime, under the fearful disorder of your one-time peaceful realm, there lay, if only you could find it, *The Crystal Box*, and the knowledge gave you courage and hope, though dim.

Somebody found out the truth at last. He was taken away, and sent to the King's School, Canterbury. He lived with his godfather, who was a canon of the cathedral, and two things stand out clear in the indistinct yet happy record of the next four years. First, the discovery of the Cathedral as a distinct, living and breathing and rather terrible personality, and second, the friendship and sympathy of the Headmaster, Mr. Galpin, the first person to take seriously his as yet very blurred and indefinite literary aspirations. For if *Arnado the Fearless*, *The Trump of the Grave* and *The Doom of the Halberts* were not actually written in those days, they were in the writing: they represented Hugh Walpole's escape from the inimical forces of Realism into the world of historical Romance!

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Now, having mentioned the Cathedral in the above connection, there are at least a hundred readers who will leap to their feet with surely rather cheap triumph, to cry out, "I *knew The Cathedral* was written from the life!" This is the kind of remark with which novelists have very little patience; to them it even appears a little vulgar. For what novelist—above all, what *romantic* novelist—indulges in the cheap and easy art of unacknowledged photography? Hugh Walpole was literally born and brought up in the shadow of cathedrals: St. Mary's was the future cathedral of Auckland; at the age of six he was brought to Truro, where his father had been Succentor; from Truro he was taken to Canterbury, and from Canterbury—the Reverend G. H. S. Walpole having been appointed Principal of Bede College, Durham—he, much to his distress, was withdrawn and entered as a day-boy at Durham School. What is such a one to write about with authority, if it be not cathedrals? And how should it be any one cathedral? Is it not bound to be a cathedral-composite? You might just as well say that the character of Archdeacon Brandon was drawn from life, in which case Mr. Walpole would undoubtedly ere now have been involved in a highly entertaining (from the onlooker's point of view) libel action. "You might just as well say—that I see what I eat. . . ." Well! It is as absurd as *that*!

In Durham, he found himself faced with two propositions—each in itself sufficiently formidable to a boy of fifteen, of all adolescent ages the most "difficult," the most inadaptably. He had left King's School, Canterbury, which had become a kind of haven, and was entered at a new school in the unenviable status of day-boy. Anyone who has experienced this wretched situation will know that to the aristocracy—that is to say, the boarding pupils—the social position of the day-boy is a cross between that of the boy who cleans the boots and the dustman; no matter what your scholastic attainments (and even here, Hugh Walpole, bearing the ineradicable marks of S——, could command no prestige) you are in outer darkness, so far as the inner life of the school is concerned.

He had also, after a lapse of several years, to renew acquaintance with his family: with a father, critical, although kind and just, and depressed by his son's lack of scholastic distinction: a mother sweet and dear and kind, but too essentially practical to have time for the "moonshine" with which Hugh's head was filled: and a brother and sister who, having been brought up together, had interests in common which Hugh could not share.

Everything was against him; his nervousness, his too obvious anxiousness to be liked, his untidiness, his apparent stupidity, his habit of mooning away time in books and mysterious scribbling instead of taking his place in the domestic circle. Out of his loneliness he invented occupations for himself: a fantastic game of bagatelle, in which the protagonists were authors, Scott, Dickens, Harrison Ainsworth, Congreve. And he spent many hours in the public library, gulping down such forgotten authors as Maturin, Bage, Holcroft and Miss Ferrier. A pale, pimpled, grubby, unattractive boy, clumsy, sensitive, conceited and abysmally unhappy, for seven years!—leading a Jekyll and Hyde existence between his dream-life and spasmodic efforts to win approval by being the sort of boy his father wanted him to be.

On a never-to-be-forgotten visit to London, he was given the choice of seeing Wilson Barrett in *The Sign of the Cross* and Tree in *Henry IV*. Tremulous with excitement, he stammered out his preference for *The Sign of the Cross*. The paternal brow clouded.

"Come, come, now, Hugh! Think again; Shakespeare, you know!"

In spite of the note of admonishment and warning in his father's voice, the quaking Hugh proffered, from the depths of his desirous heart, a dithering reiteration of his former choice: an act of untoward daring that met with its awful deserts.

"I am *disappointed* in you, Hugh!"

Would not the boy have been superhuman who, in the face of such a pronouncement, from such a source, had held to his original decision? The Walpoles went to His Majesty's Theatre; the outing was referred to as "Hugh's treat."

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Sometimes I think that death by strangulation is too good for the fatuous, middle-aged wiseacres who say that the days of childhood are the happiest days!

There came a night when he, lying wakeful, overheard his parents discussing him in the next room. Without the least intention of eavesdropping he learned that these two people whom, in his helpless, bewildered fashion, he adored, were in despair about his future. He was thenceforth profoundly convinced that his existence was a tragedy. The little prestige which had come to him, surprisingly, with an unsuspected flair for Rugger towards the end of his career at Durham, flickered out temporarily. He knew that his parents' distress was justified: that during his seven years' schooling he had learnt nothing whatever; that he could not speak a single French sentence accurately or read the simplest French book; that he knew nothing of chemistry and physics; that his spelling and arithmetic were equally doubtful (approximately ten years later, in writing *Maradick at Forty*, he spelt it *fourty* throughout!); and that for seven mortal years he was supposed to have been absorbing these forms of education at the rate—each—of three hours a week. *What was the matter with his brain?* And what was the use of being a genius in secret (for of his future high destiny young Pomfret-Walpole had no manner of doubt) if one could not, in any recognisable formula outside one's native tongue, ask one's neighbour to pass the bread and butter?

At S——, we have seen, his main alleviations were Jumbo and the Headmaster's wife; his irrepressible affections had centred themselves, during his period at Durham, on a stout and friendly parson, under whose unconscious influence he became very pious; and on one of the masters—"a fine, handsome fellow," to whose house he used to steal, Nicodemus-like, by night, and sit through happy hours with the master and his wife, both of whom were kind and understanding to the unhappy hobbledehoy; for by now, it is to be understood, Pomfret-Walpole has merged into Young Henry Trenchard. He is now in that miserable "standing water between boy and

man": the days of his adolescence are mercifully numbered, and, did he but know it, he is on the threshold of such a trans-mogrification that one is positively at a loss for words to describe it in terms that shall be intelligible to the average reader!

He had known for some years that when he grew up he was to be a clergyman.

"My only two anxieties were whether I should ever be clever enough to pass those examinations which make one a clergyman, and, secondly, if I did pass them, whether I should have time among my clerical duties for the writing of stories. My religion, too, was settled. When I was nineteen years of age I still saw quite clearly in my mind's eye God, exactly like the Bible pictures of Moses, with a long beard and dressed in a kind of nightgown, sitting on a hummocky, billowy cloud listening jealously for any sins committed by me. Behind him and co-existent with him there was a kind of Olympia White City with streets of gold, jewelled doors, crowds of angels, and Jesus Christ on a throne in a wide open courtyard. He was, in my mind, very kindly and understanding as contrasted with the ill-tempered Jehovah on the cloud outside, and when I had done something wrong I in a sort of way managed to slip past the hummocky cloud and put my case to Jesus Christ and feel, at once, that I was understood. Indeed, the one thing of real value that I got from these unhappy years was a sense of the living beauty and wonder and wisdom of Christ's character. I got it in the main, I think, from an old, drunken Scotch gardener whom we had for a time, who, in the middle of the most awful indecencies and obscenities, would suddenly, his dirty old hat cocked on one side of his head, his grimy finger pointing, begin to talk of Jesus Christ as though He were just round the corner and might at any moment appear in our dishevelled garden and take pity on our barren and sterile little orchard. 'Don't you heed what they tell you, Laddie,' I can hear him saying to me now. 'The Lord Jesus is a sight kinder than the clergy make

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Him out to be—and He'll come and have a drink with you any time you ask Him.'"¹

In the year 1903 Hugh Walpole went up to Cambridge, with a History Exhibition, to Emmanuel College. How could a youth so consummately stupid as the one we have represented gain a History Exhibition? It can only be explained by saying that Hugh Walpole was a victim of the pernicious system of education which seeks to standardise knowledge; which persists in treating all types of mind as the same mind; and which hastens to dub as a nincompoop any individual who fails to respond to the mass-production of intellect. Order and method, he says, he had none: but "had they asked me for the plot of *Hermesprong* or a list of the characters in the *Waverley Novels*, I should have astonished them with my talents." History and Literature were one to him; both were romance; with romance his head was stuffed tighter than an egg with meat.

And on the first night, in Hall, IT happened: the incredible, the romantic thing. The evil spell laid on him in the cradle by that spiteful fairy whom his parents had omitted to invite to his christening outran the span of its allotted years. In his own words: "My horrid past fell away from me." The shadow of S——, the indignities of his career at Durham, slid for ever into the limbo of things—not forgotten, for they are there to this day: their gaunt faces peer into a room cosily illuminated with firelight, which seems the cosier because of their external presence—so near, yet so utterly powerless to hurt, or harm, to wound, any longer.

The new world was a place of enchanting discoveries, of a thousand ardours: there was the ardour of making friends, of flinging oneself neck and crop into an environment which received one with the most intoxicating welcome and understanding; there was the flabbergasting discovery that one was a person of intelligence, instead of a cross between a half-wit and a congenital incapable, and that people were only too ready to

¹ *The Crystal Box.*

concede elbow-room to one's smaller foibles and mannerisms. Nor were one's triumphs limited to the intellectual; one played Rugger, it appeared, with sufficient distinction to ensure oneself a catholicity of acquaintanceship. There was no one to crush one's windy enthusiasms or to pour scorn on one's delirious tail-wagging.

Let it be remembered that Hugh Walpole went up to Cambridge in a period which preceded our latter-day sophistication. Cynicism had not the vogue which it has in the present day; it was not considered a shameful thing—*circa* 1900—to have enthusiasms, or at any rate, to air them. Noel Coward had not made it incumbent upon every self-respecting young man to have “an attitude,” in fact, people with attitudes had rather a rough time. In contemporary undergraduate correspondence you may find a rather breath-taking simplicity, taking it on the whole. In fact, the atmosphere of the Varsity of his period fitted Hugh Walpole like a glove. He came down at the end of his three years with what the present-day Varsity man would look upon as an almost indecently naïve attitude towards life, a list of friends to be written to, and from whom he expected letters, as long as your arm, and certain very earnest and pronounced ideas about his next step in life: which was looked upon, by himself and his family, as a further move in the direction of taking holy orders. It had been suggested that he should have a year with the Mersey Mission to Seamen; so to Liverpool he went, cocksure of God and of his ability to make the simple seaman sure of Him as well.

It seems a pity to have to relate, at a moment when his star seems surely in the ascendant, that the simple seaman resisted persuasion with a guile that was like a slap in the face to the optimistic missionary. It took him about a week to discover that he was miscast for the role of apostle to these hard-boiled children of the deep. It was depressing to find men with less than one-third of his own intellectual parts, and whose religious conviction was no whit stronger than his own, successful and popular with the sailors who received his own visits to the ships

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grudgingly, and with something like suspicion. He was taken in, again and again, by those smooth-tongued, oily customers who had learnt that religion might be a paying game, and he was completely at the mercy of the other, more formidable type of perfectly sincere Christian whose happiest form of sport lay in inventing traps for the unwary missionary and involving him in long and quite valueless arguments which invariably ended in favour of their propounder.

Conscious of the disapproval of his superior officer, and of a failure which nibbled at the roots of his new-found pride, our missionary looked about him, in his spare time, for more congenial occupation, which he found in two directions: one, in embarking upon a novel, with the enchanting title of *Troy Hanneton*, which filled his evenings at home, and, two, in cultivating the acquaintance of such diverse characters as the actors in a pantomime then playing at the Lyceum, and an intellectually sympathetic dentist. During this year in Liverpool he kept, with the utmost regularity and conscientiousness, a diary: largely devoted to matters like toothache, and correspondence, and the books he read, and the plays he attended. A diary written most obviously for the writer only.

But actors, dentists and *Troy Hanneton* afforded little inducement to stay in Liverpool, he made up his mind to resign his position with the Mission.

At that time, *Fräulein Schmidt* and *Mr. Anstruther* was appearing serially in the *Cornhill*, and Hugh Walpole, carried away by his enthusiasm as usual, committed some of it to paper, and, in due time, received a letter from "Elizabeth," saying what a nice young man he sounded, and inviting him to take tea with her in town at the Lyceum Club.

One gathers that he left Liverpool with a mind unclouded by regret, an extended list of correspondents (at this period of his life, he seems to have been incapable of making the most fleeting of acquaintanceships without immediately enrolling his new friend on his letter-writing list) and a bran-new crop of enthusiasms, mainly centred round writing, living in London and

"Elizabeth" herself—whom, presently, he met; found her pretty and amusing, and barely survived the shock of being invited by her to assume the tutorship of the April, May and June babies in Germany, the following autumn.

It must be recalled, in defence of this sudden interest on the part of "Elizabeth," that Pomfret-Walpole, with his pastiness and pimples, his unhappy tricks of arms and legs, and sniffing inability to give a direct answer to a direct question, is a creature of the past. In his place, behold, now, a romantic-minded young man, tall and good-looking (although "Elizabeth's" husband, Graf von Arnim, was presently to return rather ironical thanks for the photograph of the "pretty young man"). The Pretty Young Man's muscles were in remarkably good condition, thanks to Rugger, his appearance radiated that particular kind of mental and physical health which, even to sophisticated people (and "Elizabeth" was very sophisticated) is irresistible; and moreover he was dripping with enthusiasm and admiration for "Elizabeth" herself—so, taking one thing with another, it is not a matter for great surprise that, from his future employer's point of view, he fitted into the scenery of Rügen.

As there remained a considerable interval before he was called upon to take up his post, it was decided by his father (Dr. Walpole had come to Lambeth as Rector in 1904) that he might as well fill in time by pursuing his studies of the French language as a student in a French family.

In a blaze of anticipatory delight, he departed (with more additions to his correspondence list) for Villefranche, to dwell in marble halls—to put it precisely, in the château of a Marquis who had answered Dr. Walpole's advertisement with such glowing accounts of his establishment, his grounds, his shootin' and huntin' and fishin', that Hugh, not unreasonably, was filled with the most lively anticipation of the marvellous time he was to enjoy in the South of France. It was slightly quenching to discover, in place of the stage-Marquis, whose appearance lively imagination had doubtless conjured up, a minute French Professor, whose sartorial equipment was enough to make even

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the non-too-critical Cambridge of that day quiver, and who dwelt with his wife in a tiny house like Hansel and Gretel. The discovery that his host's imagination was at least equal to his own must have been poor recompense for the loss of the sport, and when in time other dissimilarities of taste and sympathy manifested themselves, the charms of Villefranche palled. There was literally nothing to do but to read French, and this he did, with an exquisite delight in the gradually unfolded treasure of the literature of another country.

This part of his education was brought to a sharp, sulphurous conclusion by the non-arrival, one month, of money due to the Marquis for board and keep; in default of which he was promptly locked into his room, informed in writing that it was useless to try to escape, as the whole of Villefranche, including the station officials, was enlisted on the Marquis's behalf against the defaulting Englishman: and fed through the door—as even Gallic indignation fell short of starvation in the circumstances. When the money arrived, Hugh Walpole wasted no further time in amenities, but set off for “Elizabeth” and Pomerania.

Up to this moment one concludes he had lived in a dream, in which the figure of Elizabeth occupied the centre of the stage, and the April, May and June babies were crowded conveniently into corners. Upon his arrival, however, the full enormity of the fact that he, with no experience whatever of instructing the young, particularly the female young, had accepted a tutor's post was borne in upon him. Briefly, our hero panicked; but panicked quietly, and mainly in his diary; and when he was not panicking, he was bored, inextinguishably, dreadfully bored. He had not sufficient work to keep him fully occupied, and he was brought into far too much social contact with the family—contact for which he was as little prepared as he was for the fulfilment of his scholastic obligations. Incredibly naïve, alternately silent and almost hysterically talkative, overflowing with raw enthusiasms, and socially difficult as only a completely simple-minded person can be, he must have been enough to set the teeth

on edge. One may fancy that by comparison with the April, May and June babies—whom he managed about as successfully as the novice may manage to drive a litter of little pigs to market—he appeared almost jaded. He suffered, also, in following a particularly brilliant and sophisticated young man, the previous tutor, Mr. E. M. Forster.

So he took refuge in *Troy Hanneton*, now nearly finished, and about to be sent to A. C. Benson (who returned it without enthusiasm) and in his diary. And he wrote copiously to his friends, and received enormous parcels of literature from England.

Taking all in all, it must be confessed that his initial effort in tutoring was about as little of a success as his mission to the seamen. Hugh Walpole returned to England.

And from now onwards, one begins to trace the growth of a personality to be taken seriously; to feel that the attitude of kindly badinage, which his youth and naïvetés invited, is out of place. Hugh Walpole has grown up; although the days of his defeats are not at an end (he has yet to go through the grim experiences of his schoolmastering venture) they are numbered.

The idea of taking holy orders has passed into the background. His first action, on returning to London, was to call upon the agents, Gabbitts and Thring, who, favourably impressed by an attractive and eager personality, recommended several posts to him. He went for an interview: flared into one of his enthusiasms over the personality of one of the schoolmasters whom he met, and could hardly wait for term to begin to assume his new status as instructor to, this time, the male young—a delightful exchange, he felt sure, for his experiences in Rügen. His literary aspirations were slightly under eclipse, owing to the tepid reception, by A. C. Benson, of *Troy Hanneton*.

To shorten matters, Hugh Walpole's experience of schoolmastering is summarised in *Mr. Perrin and Mr. Traill*, that grim history of common-room strife. It is the only one of his novels in which one can detect bitterness; even so, there is more of horror than of bitterness in it. He fled to London, with thirty

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pounds in his pocket, the manuscript of his first published novel, *The Wooden Horse*, and an optimism undimmed by his second unfortunate experience in the gentle art of earning his living.

He took a room in Glebe Place, Chelsea, at four shillings a week—how like a fairy-tale it sounds! Are there any rooms to be had nowadays, by struggling writers, for four shillings a week? A decade later I was to think myself lucky in securing one at nine shillings a week, and that in a workman's cottage, down the Warwick Road.

In the second part of *The Apple Trees* Hugh Walpole writes thus of his first book:

“ I had quite deliberately put into it everything that would, I hoped, help it. Cornish scenery of a very coloured kind, a noble, long-suffering hero, a beautiful heroine, a female sinner who repented, a theme apposite to the day, I had done these things deliberately and yet not deliberately. As always, so soon as my fairy-tale began I was carried away, believed in it utterly, lived, ate and drank with my characters. It was a neat little book of no importance, except that it showed that I could tell a story and had an incurably romantic mind.”

Anyone who has ever submitted a manuscript to the Press—and in these days, when the urge to see ourselves in print is nearly as prevalent as measles a decade or two ago, there must be few who have not tasted the experience—will appreciate his feelings when Hugh Walpole opened an envelope to learn that Smith Elder, to whom, aiming at the highest, he had sent his novel, had accepted it. His own description of how he rushed round to the little Chelsea restaurant known as “The Good Intent,” sat boldly down among the artists, and, crying out that his novel had been accepted, bade them drink his health, is wholly charming.

The citadel was stormed; but the acceptance of a novel cannot keep a young man, even if he be drunk on the honey-dew of his first success, in all those necessities which living in London, among a rapidly widening circle of friends, discovers. So his

bread and butter was contributed by his attachment to a literary agency run at that time by Mr. Curtis Brown, and his American partner, Massie: who started Hugh Walpole off with the interesting but sadly uncongenial task of interviewing celebrities with a view to getting material for a book on Careers for Young Men.

For all his self-confidence, he was a rank failure as an interviewer, and was vastly relieved when the sub-editor of the *Daily Standard*, Mr. Samuel Jeyes, put some reviewing in his way. He fell upon his novels with the ferocity of a tiger-cub upon a meat-bone. It would be amusing to compare his present urbanity, his kindly assumption that there is some good in practically everything, with the cut-and-slash methods of young Mr. Walpole of the *Standard*! In these days when the tradition of Hugh Walpole's kindliness has made a few superior people discredit him as a critic, it is not out of place to recall that his was the first review of Lawrence's *White Peacock* that appeared in print: that he was among the very first to acclaim Rose Macaulay, David Garnett, Ralph Hodgson, Henry Handel Richardson, E. M. Young and many more: that his was the first critical book on Joseph Conrad to appear in English: and that he has never ceased to vociferate in favour of the experimental school of writing whose supporters are patronising towards his own literary output.

Since the first draft of this chapter was written the Golden Cockerel Press has produced Hugh Walpole's *The Apple Trees*, which is, in substance, an extension of *The Crystal Box*, and conveys, in its third section, titled "Henry James's High Hat," a clear-cut impression of the literary world of this period.

During this time in Chelsea, *Maradick at Forty*, *Mr. Perrin and Mr. Traill* and *Prelude to Adventure* followed *The Wooden Horse* at punctual intervals of a year. 1913 found him down in Cornwall, working at Polperro on *Fortitude*, the first of his novels to score a notable success. Pomfret-Walpole's vision has materialised; he is an established novelist.

And, in 1914, the War broke out.

In the first week of the War Hugh Walpole travelled up to

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London—to be rejected on account of his sight. On receipt of this set-back, his first action was to offer his services to the *Daily Mail*, who immediately sent him out as a war correspondent. But, by one of those mischievous tricks which dogged his war-time career, Kitchener chose that moment to decree that no more correspondents should be allowed at the front, so Hugh Walpole found himself out of a job almost as soon as he had secured one.

He now made his decision to go out to Russia as a free-lance. Arrived in Moscow, his first question was how to get to the front line. It seemed, however, that the gates of heaven were easily accessible by comparison with that seemingly so trivial, so obvious objective. His Russian was negligible, his appearance glaringly British. In the circumstances, it was the act of a romantic, or of a lunatic (for once the two were synonymous), to disguise himself as a Russian soldier, and make for Warsaw, in company with two Russians and their female companions. Naturally, he was discovered, and sent back to Moscow, where, through the agency of one of those busybodies who found scope for their zeal in chivvying others better employed, he was the recipient of the white feather! The humour of the white feather, to one who had just taken the risk of being shot for a spy was, fortunately, sufficiently perceptible to its recipient, whose only preoccupation at the moment was the apparently impossible task of getting to the front.

Someone came to the rescue with a suggestion; he found that the best thing to do was to train in a St. Petersburg hospital, from which, eventually, he passed out as a stretcher-bearer to the Ninth Army. Hugh Walpole went in triumph to the Carpathians—to arrive there just a week before the retreat began: the retreat which lasted for a year!

The only definite information which one can get out of him regarding this period is this:

“I went out one night and got into the Austrian lines by mistake and brought back a man, so they gave me the St. George.”

He was the last man in history to get the Russian Order of St. George. Immediately after this he got dysentery, and they motored him sixty versts back. He nearly died. On his convalescence he went back to England.

His *Duchesse of Wrexhe* was on the bookstalls, his *Golden Scarecrow* in the hands of the publishers. *The Dark Forest* was stirring in the back of his mind; but the British ambassador at St. Petersburg had views for the employment of the English novelist, and for a glorious year Hugh Walpole was King's Messenger; this was his brightest experience of the war years.

In 1916 (the year of *The Dark Forest*, the first of Hugh Walpole's war novels, and the fruits of his experiences in the Carpathians) he and Harold Williams started British propaganda in St. Petersburg. Of this he was to write three years later, in *The Secret City*, a book which, from many points of view, I look upon as his finest pre-Herries novel. It is a much greater book than *The Dark Forest*: much more mature; in it his genius moves on, a wheel turns, locks in another cog. Again and again we pick up the thread of the Russian influence in his later novels; not that Hugh Walpole ever accomplishes the almost impossible task (from an English point of view) of seeing Russia through Russian eyes. His Russia is as Anglicised as Yoshio Markino's London is orientalised. How could so intrinsically optimistic a temperament as Hugh Walpole's plumb the dark depths of Russian pessimism? He does it in theory; spiritually he is a thousand miles from it.

The revolution put a stop to British propaganda, and in the spring of 1918 Hugh Walpole was in charge of the Russian department of the Ministry of Information run by Lord Beaverbrook. He was there when peace was declared, and, in 1919, leaving behind him the manuscripts of *Jeremy* and *The Secret City*, he went on his first American lecture tour.

In tendering to the reader an apology for this cursory dismissal of four vital years of a man's life, I refer him to the two novels already cited: to *The Dark Forest* and *The Secret City*, both of which have the autobiographical flavour, and from which more

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may be learnt of Hugh Walpole's war experience than may be gathered from conversation with their writer.

Fourteen years have passed. They are the years of any man at the head of his profession. Their adventures are the adventures of maturity, their history is the history of steady development, of deliberate ascent of the ladder of fame. Their milestones are such novels as *The Cathedral* (1922), *The Old Ladies* (1924), *Harmer John* (1926), *Wintersmoon* (1928) and *Hans Frost* (1929); the pinnacle of their achievement is the Herries saga. It is not often that a man's works follow so uninterrupted a crescendo. The books which fall between these dates do nothing to interrupt the climbing motif, for, in a sense, they do not belong; they are little books, intending to be little; each represents the recreative moment which necessarily follows major effort. *Jeremy and Hamlet* is a continuation of the child-novel *Jeremy*, published in 1919; *Jeremy at Crale* brings it to its logical conclusion. *The Silver Thorn* is a collection of short stories, *Farthing Hall* an unimportant collaboration with J. B. Priestley. *The Portrait of a Man with Red Hair*, which is a sort of pendant to *Maradick at Forty*, is a jewel of its kind—which Clemence Dane describes as a shocker. And even *Above the Dark Circus*, which was subjected to a degree of captious criticism from critics who, having had their taste whetted by *Rogue Herries*, were impatient of lighter fare, admirably fulfils its object as one of those long-drawn-out studies of fear in which Hugh Walpole excels. *Judith Paris* must have come as a shock to those *cognoscenti* who declared, on the strength (or, according to them, on the weakness) of *Above the Dark Circus*, that Hugh Walpole had written himself out in *Rogue Herries*. *The Fortress* continues the upward sweep; one is interested to hear the opinions of the Doctor Know-Alls, when *Vanessa* makes its appearance, in August of the present year.

I know little—and confess to wishing to know no more—of the Hugh Walpole of London: the social Hugh Walpole,

the rather magnificent Hugh Walpole, who becomes slightly ecclesiastical under the influence of pompous society, or the Hugh Walpole who exploits his charm at literary gatherings. These Hugh Walpoles have nothing in common with the Hugh Walpole who stands on a windy hillside, ankle-deep in ling, looking down upon little Watendlath, sombre in its cup of the hills: whose spate of conversation ("I've never met anyone who talked as much as you do, Hugh." "Well, you talk quite a lot yourself, don't you?") ceases to remind one of Lodore, and is stilled before the spectacle of Glaramara shrouding its massive shoulders in rainclouds, or Skiddaw, *femme galante* among mountains, tricking herself out every moment in a fresh sorcery of lights and shadows: who, for no reason whatever, heaves a sigh out of the depth of his lungs as he carves the mutton, and says: "Oh, I'm so happy to-day!"—because the last Herries chapter is a success, or because someone in whom he is interested has written to him, or simply because it happens to be one of the days when all the streams on Catbells are chiming, and only a person devoid of spirit and sense can withhold a tribute to the gaiety of Nature: who gleefully recites a long story against himself: who lies on his spine smoking his pipe while he talks about the trend of modern literature: who gets up in the middle of the night to go out and look at Derwentwater under a ragged moon—yes; that is well in the literary tradition; but why not?

Hugh Walpole to-day is a rich man who has made the best kind of use of his riches; whose sense of values has not become blurred or distorted through the increase of his capacity to indulge his desires; who has not allowed celebrity to thrust the little joys, the little pleasures, the little pains and griefs out of his life; whose sympathies burn the more brightly, now that he is able to give freer expression to them; and whose generosity, in both a material and a spiritual sense, colours his outlook on the entire world. A perfect host and an adorable guest—because of his gift for fitting into any type of environment. There can be no living man who is less affected—in an unpleasant sense—by his celebrity.

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In his flat in Piccadilly and in his cottage in Borrowdale he has gathered beauty about him; in his study overlooking Derwentwater is housed probably the best collection of modern paintings to be seen outside an exhibition. It is better than an exhibition, because it expresses the selectiveness of one man in whom is vested a peculiar sensitiveness to all forms of art. One can prowling round that calm and lovely room, identifying May Beringer's piece of red amber, the peach-coloured carpets in Osmund's flat, the Chinese horses of *The Silver Thorn*.

He belongs to Borrowdale in a way that no one lacking that strain of Northern blood could hope to do. The North, as a whole, is distrustful of the South; the ways of the Southerner are not our ways, their thought processes are different from our own. But the North has accepted Hugh Walpole; it even pays him the compliment of being jealous of his southern connections, which it does its best to forget. It has accepted him as its interpreter: not that it cares particularly whether "foreigners" understand it or not. But it feels that through him it will be truly and justly represented in the eyes of the world: without sentimentality—which it abhors—but with due regard to that curious blend of common sense and romance which is the birth-right of the Lakeland dweller.

CHAPTER THREE

INTRODUCTION

THE word "Introduction," Astute Reader (whose hackles are rising at the inappositeness of such a heading to a third chapter, when already a matter of some eighty pages have been digested), refers, less to the material which, in the course of this book, I shall hope to deploy, but to the characters upon which we are about to generalise—a task rendered more easy by a certain similarity which links them, although never to the degree where interest is lost, and also by Mr. Walpole's amiable idiosyncrasy for drawing his favourite characters lovingly after him from book to book.

Thus, we meet Peter Westcott, the hero of *Fortitude*, in *The Thirteen Travellers* (where he enjoys a whole short story to himself) and in *The Young Enchanted*, before we relinquish him with a regret that is tempered by our inward conviction that Mr. Walpole has not dismissed him for ever from our ken in the pages of *Hans Frost*. The massive shadows of the Beaminster family lie across the pages of *The Duchess of Wrexhe*, *The Green Mirror*, *The Captives*, *The Young Enchanted* and *Wintersmoon*; we meet the Trenchards, who are "for ever England," first in *The Green Mirror*, and follow the divagations of their family fortunes through *The Captives* and *The Young Enchanted*; we even follow the most hapless of their number to Russia, to bid him eternal farewell in *The Dark Forest*, that most tragic of the Walpole novels. We follow young Jeremy Cole joyfully through the three volumes dedicated to his childhood, and are charmed to meet him—although it is a mere chance encounter—in *Harmer John*, a book which gives us other opportunity of

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greeting old friends, in the form of the young Brandons, and old enemies, such as Canon Ronder, from its forerunner, *The Cathedral*. And this without mentioning the host of references too numerous to verify, that link one book with another, one group of characters with its prototypes, and flatter the reader with a suggestion of intimate acquaintance.

In the opening paragraph of his first novel, *The Woodcock Horse*, Hugh Walpole sets, unconsciously, the key-note of much of his latter work:

“We are Trojans: we are old and expensive and very very good, and it behoves you to recognise this fact and give way with fitting deference.”

The Walpole characters that linger in the memory are not the youthful ones—always excepting the immortal Jeremy and young Henry Trenchard (to my mind the most exquisite study in adolescence which modern literature affords) but his old people: not only the monumentals, like the Duchess of Wrexhe the Duke of Romney and Hans Frost: but such characters as old Mr. Warlock, Lord John Beaminster, Sir Jeremy Trojan the old Baron Wildeling—no more than a vignette upon the Walpolian page—Absalom Jay and Sir Charles Duncombe (to choose at random), with their feminine counterparts, Lady Bell-Hall, Mrs. Trenchard, the Duchess of Romney and Agatha Payne.

No writer has ever shown such a deep tenderness for an understanding of old age, with its foibles, its whims, its cruelty and its capacity for suffering in a spiritual as well as a physical sense. There is hardly a novel but contains some memorable aspect of old age, treated with no frigid, impersonal dissection but built up from the elements that underlie the pitiful latter day caricature of its original. One feels that Hugh Walpole's interest in age is not for age itself but for what it epitomises: for all the history of love and lusts, of triumph and defeat, of joy and despair that hides itself behind greying hair, dim eyes and tremulous hands. Others, less thoughtful, may accept it at face

value; for them it is too much trouble to penetrate the tiresome barricade of little annoying habit, of repulsive physical disability, of irritating mental shortcoming that imposes a limit on intercourse. Other authors may relegate their old characters to the background, unless they are of that type so unrepresentative of age in general, some perennially active (in both mental and physical sense) old man or woman, with the reins of government clasped in a relentless hand. Such characters are common enough in literature; they are easy in creation, dramatic in themselves, in their present. It takes a Hugh Walpole to find hidden behind the commonplace of old age the hidden loveliness of forgotten youth: to see at a glance, past the loosened lines of an old woman's mouth, the ardour of the lips that a lover kissed, and, behind an old man's paunch, the swift and urgent body that brought its owner honour fifty years ago. And, because these things are more actual to him than the wreck and ruin of beauty which actually lies before him, he can show to that ruin a tenderness beyond the scope of more impatient individuals.

Let it not be assumed, in reading the above, that Hugh Walpole brings to his delineations of age any of that nauseating sentimentality which is justly taboo in the present day. The person who writes of old age sentimentally is the unimaginative person, the person who is obliged to supplement his own lack of sensitiveness by the use of a formula, in short, the person who is not sincere. Hugh Walpole's sincerity reaches its peak in his introduction to Agatha Payne¹:

"She was not a cleanly old woman. Her splendid hair, as black now as forty years ago, was tumbled about her head carelessly and stuck into it askew was a cheap black comb studded with glass diamonds. Her colour was swarthy, brown under the deep red of her cheeks, and there was a faint moustache on her upper lip. But she must have been handsome once, a fine, bold girl in those years long ago. Quite

¹ *The Old Ladies*.

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shapeless now, her fat, dirty arms naked under the wrapper, her body as it lolled back in the chair boneless. Once and again she yawned, then felt in a dirty paper bag on the table near to her for a thick slab of nougat that she crumbled idly in the bag, then ate fragments of it, licking slowly her fingers. Her face was expressionless. Her large black eyes stared out into the room vacantly.

“ . . . She had always been lazy, taking what came nonchalantly. She had taken . . . her absolute loneliness and isolation—every thing she had taken with a luxurious sensual indifference. Her two passions—and they were in their basis one—were for food and bright colours.”

Yet mark how Mr. Walpole writes of this greedy, sensual old woman a few pages later:

“ She had been expecting to see nothing but two old women gossiping together; rather than that she saw, straight before her, as though it had been placed there for her especial glory, the heart and centre of all the colour of the world. . . Far back, deep set in her gipsy ancestry, she had been arrayed as a queen and colour of flame and fire, and running splendour had been her rightful dower.

“ Now she clutched her soiled wrapper about her breasts and lusted for possession as never, in her lazy, sensuous, imaginative life, she had lusted before.”

Thus, with an impeccable justice, he mingles the sordid and the beautiful. This book, *The Old Ladies*, might fitly be called Hugh Walpole's epic of old age; much must be written of it in its place. The three contrasted types—of which May Beringer, that bit of Victorian flotsam, is the most pitiful, and among whom the character of Mrs. Bloxam, the charwoman, is not to be discounted—afford a study so finely drawn that the Duchess of Wrexhe seems obvious by comparison.

Here we have her for what she is worth—in the book to which she gives her name; but this kind of thing has been done before; the autocratic old woman is a stock figure in fiction,

and although no one would deny that Mr. Walpole has dealt with her in masterly fashion, her interest lies less in her own character than in what she stands for; which, of course, is precisely what Mr. Walpole intended, but it minimises her personal value. At any rate, hers, above all the Walpole characters save those admittedly fantastic, is the fairy-tale character revealed in the following paragraph:

“ Out of that very necessity of disease, however, had she dragged her drama. She had retired from the world, not as an old woman beaten by pain, but as a priestess might withdraw within her sanctuary, or some great queen demand her privacy.

“ And it had its effect. Very, very carefully were chosen to see her only those who would convey to the world the right impression. The world was given to understand that the Duchess was now more wonderful than she had ever been, and it was so long since the world at large had seen her that every sort of story was abroad.”¹

In other words, Mr. Walpole “ wangles ” his Duchess, but honestly allows us to see his wangling. She is an extreme type, of magnificence already legendary, and, wangling or not, we are grateful to Mr. Walpole for discovering her to us. She is a direct appeal to our romanticism, and our reaction to her must vary in ratio with the degree of this romanticism. Some there are bound to be who find “ this dark pirate of her period ” most convincing in that grey moment when she gasps:

“ “ That was only a dream—only a dream. Suppose it should be true, though ? What if I *were* to die to-night ? ” ”

The figure of the Duchess of Wrexhe is bound to stir the younger generation to an enormous feeling of opposition; all the defiance of authority which marks an age which has most emphatically asserted its right to think for itself will rise to refute the power of that *fin de siècle* autocracy emanating from Portland Place. The younger generation will fling back its cropped heads to look up at the new B.B.C. building with its

¹ *The Duchess of Wrexhe.*

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curving façade, modern bas-reliefs and curious mounting of storey on storey, reminiscent of a child's effort with a box of bricks—which has the effect of making the Queen's Hall, the Round Church and the Langham appear by contrast like a group of seedy poor relations. "What would she say to that?" they snort. Gone are the days when society took its cue from a sick old woman, hugging tradition in her bedroom in Portland Place; but is not the very opposition roused by the name of the Duchess of Wrexham a tribute to her malevolent spirit which still broods upon the scene of its earthly victories?

Thus, in belittling her character, we come face to face with its grim reality, and once more bestow our homage on the author who can persuade us that we are quarrelling over a once-living person.

The Duchess of Romney—seen through the eyes of her son as

"apparently slow, unintelligent, conventional, and then, when you least expect it, dominating and overwhelming"¹—

is, for all her distracting preoccupations with charities, societies, meetings, assemblies and the Church of England, so familiar to the majority that we greet her with misgiving. If young and unregenerate, we have spent much time in giving her the slip for fear she involves us in her schemes, and, if we have passed the years of irresponsibility, we have a cold sort of suspicion that she does not feel we take with sufficient seriousness our duties as landowners, employers, parents and patterns to our social inferiors. It takes Hugh Walpole to show us, in a series of delightful touches, that she is really rather a dear after all. We are told that she "had known a spasm of artistic emotion," which accounted for the Morris wall paper in the drawing-room; that her voice suggested "nothing so much as a kettle on the boil"; that her "strange round saucer of grey hair stood over her puckered face like a turban." When we are shown her little fat underlip trembling and her blue eyes swimming with thankfulness when her son Wildherne brought her a prospective daughter—

¹ *Wintersmoon*.

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in-law whom she knew it would be easy to dominate, because she had been poor and struggling, we feel that we have the measure of the Duchess of Romney, and we are quite prepared to accept Humphrey's table of preference, which runs:

"DADDY HIGNETT GRANDFATHER HAWES GRAND-MOTHER,"

except that personally we would place grandfather a long way ahead of the whole list.

The Duke of Romney is one of Hugh Walpole's monuments. One feels that there is nothing about this old gentleman of a finer age that is not noble and of good report. His angelic kindness to Janet Poole before the birth of her child is only the logical sequel to the terms on which he himself stood with his son:

" ' Father, you hate Jehovah. So do I. I loathe him, the dirty bully. ' " ¹

The youthful pronouncement seems, somehow, to illuminate the Duke more clearly than Wildherne himself. One trembles when the intimacy which it reveals is threatened by Janet's hysterical revelation of the terms upon which she and Wildherne had married:

" But as she cried there his eyes stared above her dark head into the room. He looked frightened, bewildered and terribly unhappy. Wildherne, the child of his life and power, the heart of his ambition, the pride of his eyes, false, weak, playing the blackguard like any other man. . . .

" His arms closed tightly about Janet as though he would defend her against the ghosts of evil and the deadly powers of the obscene world."

In this book, *Wintersmoon*, so rich in studies of age—for, beside the Duke and Duchess we have the lovable figure of Lord John Beaminster, whose love for Tom Seddon is the benediction on a life of plump and harmless self-indulgence, we have the return of the cosmopolitan Felix Brun from *The*

¹ *Wintersmoon*.

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Duchess of Wrexhe, and we have old Mrs. Beddoes, the charwoman—Mr. Walpole introduces, for no very clear purpose, save, one might say, that wasteful richness of an invention which delights in the fine art of superimposition, the figure of Canary Profett.

Shades of the romantic! What a name!—and what a gem of characterisation! There is something positively orchidaceous in this study of an old gentleman left high and dry by the recession of the social tide which had floated his bark merrily during the gay Edwardian years. A relic, “clinging on with his thin, bony fingers to a world which was swiftly abandoning him”: mouthing threadbare platitudes with a fearful solemnity—an inborn conviction that any statement made by Canary Profett was as the dropping of pearls and rubies before swine:

“ ‘ My dear fellow, honestly you don’t know what you’re talking about. Things are awful, positively awful. There’s no reverence left for anything, I assure you. One’s shoved about . . . why, it’s too terrible. You should go in a Tube, my dear fellow! ’ ”¹

Poor Canary! Mourning his tea-parties at which foreign dukes from places with names like Schwellenburg, Mecklenburg and Strelitz appeared—his one achievement the foundation of the Selemite Club. “The English gentleman is dead.” Yet the Duke of Romney lives . . . will live long after the Canary Profetts have been thrown out on the dustheap.

It is the companion picture to Absalom Jay: it is one of Hugh Walpole’s most trenchant exposés of the kind of thing the War cleared out of our midst. Yet in the very exposure, he seems to show us how harmless it was, how little important, save to itself and to the infinitesimal section of society to which it belonged. Is the function of every living creature to be measured in terms of its usefulness? Had not Canary Profett and his crowd a right to their existence, such as it was? And, if it required justification, surely that is forthcoming in the fact that they wore very pleasant

¹ *Wintersmoon*.

neck-ties, and advertised their tailors by an impeccable taste in clothes, and were very agreeable on all occasions, and saved many a poor woman from extinction by boredom when nothing better offered? So may it not be said that they served their purpose as truly as more serious individuals?

It will doubtless be observed that the majority of types which I have cited belong to what used to be called "the privileged classes." The major part of Mr. Walpole's output does concern itself with these classes; but those who seek for a corresponding superiority of outlook may seek in vain, for in none of his books will one trace the *snobisme* characteristic of—and limiting—the novels of Galsworthy, the consciously "county" outlook that fills the reader of broader horizons with a kind of impatience. There is in Walpole none of the limitation of a self-conscious aristocracy to which one might admit he is entitled; he regards with an equal simplicity his Beaminsters and the family of Penethen; there is no vulgar exclusiveness in his attitude to his humbler characters, no patronage. In this he is very modern; it is the modern writer's "slant" upon society. Thackeray's servants are caricatures, viewed through the mocking eye of one fully persuaded of his birthright of superiority; Dickens was incapable of creating a gentleman, and therefore poked fun at the upper classes. The modern school prides itself on hobnobbing with Tom, Dick and Harry, but, as it does this self-consciously, its sincerity may very often be called in question. Not so with Hugh Walpole, to whom the lives of his servants, his shopkeepers, his fishermen and his small-town bigwigs are fully as vital as those of his Trenchards and Duncombes.

The fact that his "great" characters, the Duchess of Wrexhe, the Duke of Romney, Archdeacon Brandon, Peter Westcott, Hans Frost and perhaps Katherine Trenchard belong to the aristocratic, or, at least, cultured classes may be accounted for thus: that Mr. Walpole finds in the lives of such people a richer, more complicated pattern upon which to exercise his genius: that the degree of an individual's sophistication no doubt determines the degree of his moral, spiritual and social complexities:

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and that there is no literary affectation more pernicious than that which considers that in order to discover "great" subjects the writer must get "back to the soil." A great deal of the "back to the soil" writing of the last decade has been merely an excuse for a cheap sensationalism, an exploitation of rustic vice or rustic virtue in terms equally unbalanced. This work is rather like that of the Primitives in painting: it has a certain value, at least so far as its sincerity holds good; so far as it does not become primitivism aping primitivism; but when the sincerity gives out, it becomes as unsatisfactory as a fake antique and has absolutely no value whatever in the scale of modern literature.

What is the "great" subject?—the "great" novel?

It is undoubtedly that which makes the strongest possible appeal to the widest possible circle of readers. It differs from the "popular" novel in that it demands intellectual as well as emotional understanding; it eschews the sensational, relying for its development on certain basic facts imbedded in the whole evolution of the human race. Of whatever country it may be written, it must interpret itself in terms intelligible to humanity in general; it must pass the looking-glass test. It must bear in mind that certain prejudices, certain emotions are common to all times and all nations: that certain beliefs are at the root of all social life, and that certain results wait upon certain premises. The ultimate reconciliation of the results with their premises is in the hands of the writer, and his success may be measured by the completeness with which he brings about his reconciliation. Any personal extravaganza on the main theme is permissible, so long as the writer effects his object—which is to take a rough chunk of human life, hew it into facets, and hold it up to his reader, so that the latter may recognise himself in every facet. A steady courage, a scrupulous justice, an absence of prejudice is necessary, beyond literary skill, and the whole thing will fail of its object should the sincerity of the writer be called in question.

With the exception of his Russian books, Hjalmar Johanssen and an odd character here or there, Mr. Walpole has found his subjects and his types within the British Isles. Unlike many

modern writers, he has not found it necessary to fertilise his genius in foreign soil. The Society he gives us "struts and frets its hour" on the London stage; his humbler characters are distributed from Cornwall, through his beloved Glebeshire—which is Cornwall-plus-Walpole—to the Lake District. He is in a very special sense an English writer, whose characters fulfil their destiny on English soil. He does not chase his High Society along the Riviera or among the skyscrapers of New York or through the fashionable restaurants of Paris and Berlin. Not that one senses any antipathy to these acknowledged playgrounds, but that he feels that the true lives of these individuals are bound up in English earth; that by placing them in Paris or New York they suffer some defocusing process—which is precisely what does happen to the islander, transferred to his own or another continent.

The number of characters occupied in literary output in Mr. Walpole's novels is bound at some moment or other to strike the reader. From the adorable Henry Galleon, whose personality is kept so skilfully in our minds that it is hardly credible that one only meets him in a single novel, down to Hans Frost, we have a succession of young writers. Peter Westcott is the first of them; he wrote *Reuben Hallard*, *Mortimer Stant* and *The Fiery Tree*. There is a young man called Bohun, with a book of poems called *Discipline* to his credit; there is my beloved Henry Trenchard, wrestling with his first novel; there is Mr. Magnus; there is Sir Charles Duncombe. In novel after novel Hugh Walpole exhibits to his readers, through the person of one or other of his characters, the successive stages of the disease known as authorship, which periodically reaches a crisis in publishing a book. The solicitude he displays for each one of his literally-minded characters shows itself in his identification of each of their novels; it is never "just a book" that any of them has written, it is an achievement as living and actual as any of Mr. Walpole's own novels. One gets the impression that the book, whatever it may be, is as definitely in the mind of Mr. Walpole as in that of Peter Westcott, or Hans Frost, or whoever it may be. In

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fact, it rather reminds one of the *Punch* story about the man who wrote a book about a man who wrote a book about a man who wrote a book about a man . . . *ad libitum*. Henry Galleon wrote *The Three Magicians*, *Mrs. Whippet*, *Old Cain and Abel*, and *The Slumber Family*. But that rich wastefulness of invention, which must make many a novelist tearing his hair for a suitable title to his latest novel gnash his teeth with an envious fury, reaches high-water mark in the list of the works of Hans Frost:

- 1889. *The Crystal Bell*.
- 1891. *The Praddons*.
- 1892. *The Blissful Place*.
- 1893. *On the Road*. (Poems.)
- 1895. *The Duchess of Paradis*.
- 1896. *Queen Rosalind*.
- 1898. *The Miltonic Spirit*. (Essays.)
- 1899. *The Palace of Ice*.
- 1900. *Laura Merries*.
- 1903. *Green Parrots*.
- 1904. *Friendly Places*. (Travel.)
- 1905. *Goliath*.
- 1906. *The Philistines*.
- 1907. *In Israel*. (Evidently a trilogy, these.)
- 1909. *The Silver Tree*.
- 1910. *Troilus*. (Poems.)
- 1912. *Walter Savage Landor: Critical Study*.
- 1913. *Joy Has Three Faces*.
- 1914. *The Chinese Miracle*.
- 1916. *The War and the Artist*. (Essays.)
- 1919. *Eumenides*. (Poems.)
- 1922. *The Scornful Sun*.
- 1924. *King Richard the Fourth*.¹

What other writer beside myself has longed to beg one of those royally squandered titles?—to be allowed to write around “Joy Has Three Faces” or “The Blissful Place”? “The

¹ *Hans Frost*.

Duchess of Paradis": the name has the chime of crystal bells. These books have not been—will never be—written; yet one believes in them, as one believes in Hans Frost, as one believes in and pays homage to Henry Galleon.

"I would urge you, I would implore you, to keep nothing before you but the one thing that can bring Life into Art. . . .

"Never mind if they tell you that story-telling is a cheap thing, a popular thing, a mean thing. It is the instrument that is given to you and if, when you come to die, you know that, for brief minutes, you have heard, and that what you have heard you have written, Life has been justified.

"Nothing else can console you, nothing else can comfort you. There must be restraint, austerity, discipline—words must come to you easily, but only because life has come to you with so great a pain . . . the Artist's life is the harshest that God can give to man. Make no mistake about that. Fortitude is the artist's only weapon of defence . . .

"The whole duty of Art is listening for the voice of God."¹

In these words of Henry Galleon's there seems to lie the justification of all that as a writer one has ever tried to do.

In a writer of Mr. Walpole's calibre it is positively refreshing to come across an indubitable weakness—if, in the face of his successes, one dare name it as such. It is a weakness which would have militated against his standing in France; but so peculiar is the British mental constitution that one wonders if this very weakness is not part of the secret of his strength in British eyes.

It is to the weakness of his younger female characters that I refer²—a point which the younger English writer is inclined to make a touchstone of his success. The Modern Girl—even the Modern Young Woman—does not exist for Mr. Walpole; his one attempt to create a young woman of fashion, in Rosalind

¹ *Fortitude*.

² I wish to make it clear that I dissociate the Herries saga from the above criticism; for in Judith Paris Mr. Walpole achieved a female character as powerful and appealing in its way as Tess of the D'Urbervilles.

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Seddon, is a pasteboard failure, his nearest approach to success the unsympathetic character of Clare Westcott, and, perhaps, Maggie Cardinal. Imagine a novelist with no notable young women to his credit, proffering a claim to immorality! Superficially, the notion is absurd; yet, when one comes to examine it, it is less illogical than it appears, taking into account that British idiosyncrasy towards sex which forms so diverting a basis for continental discussions of our literary form.

The English, taking them on the whole, are still profoundly distrustful of what is known as the sex novel. The reason is, of course, that England insists upon a longer sexual ignorance among its young people than any other nation. Sex, in England, is still an exciting business: so exciting that the average English person to whom all outward evidence of excitement is bad form, unless it concerns sport, which exempts the individual from social convention, hushes it up and pretends that it is a matter of extreme unimportance. He is ready to damn with the stigma of "extravagance" any writer, continental or English, who evidences a frank preoccupation with sexual matters; such a writer's characters are "unnatural" or "overdrawn."

The English standpoint has shifted slightly, it will be observed, from the days when such matters were regarded as "indecent" and unfit for public consumption. These terms are now *démodé* and ousted from popular use. The amateur critic has very cleverly shifted his ground—it is his strategical response to the younger generation which clamours for an end to the hush-hush policy of a bygone age. He is ready to accept his sex, so long as it is strictly kept within a certain formula. Certain words, certain forms of expression are still taboo; a wholly naturalistic representation of sexual relationships, as in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, is, much to his satisfaction, censored; he shrugs his shoulders over the translations of Colette's novels. *The Gentle Libertine*! No English schoolgirl would behave in such a way—thank heaven! He regards *The Gentle Libertine* as forced, unnatural and extremely unhealthy. Sex in English literature is still regarded as unhealthy, unless it is conveyed in terms of

innuendo, which older people may read and smile over, deluding themselves that the implications are lost upon their young sons and daughters. It is an amazing reflection that the English reader is still liable to base his judgments on a standard of what is fit and what is not fit for the consumption of the Young Person!

Naturally, the foregoing remarks are intended to apply, not to the cultured and thoughtful section of the community, but to that unfortunately much larger and more powerful section which is neither cultured nor thoughtful, and dislikes to be called upon to exercise its mind over matters regarding which convention and tradition have supplied it with a set of cut-and-dried opinions.

The English reader belonging to this class is therefore unprepared to accept anything which is sexually volcanic, in character or situation. This attitude forms the basis of all his judgments, and limits his appreciation of wider forms of art. His admiration of an author is apt to be qualified by the word "but," and his praise smudged with the expression "if only!" And although it is impossible that England as a nation should have remained intellectually at a standstill through the great literary advance of the last fifty years, it must be admitted that for one pioneer there are at least forty obstructionists, that for such as the latter D. H. Lawrence, James Joyce and Aldous Huxley might just as well never have existed, and that amateur literary criticism in England to-day stands exactly where it did during the latter part of the reign of Queen Victoria.

Now, it follows as the night the day that, deprived of a powerful feminine interest, no novel can contain that so dangerous, so undesirable, so uncomfortable quality known as sex. And herein, I have the temerity to suggest, lies part of the secret of Mr. Walpole's success, not with his cultured and thoughtful readers, whose grounds of admiration are based on a hundred and one other reasons, but with the general public, the what one might call solid, family section of the community: 70 per cent. of whom, it must be remembered, patronise the libraries, as against the 30 per cent. of readers with any sort of literary acumen. Until the inception of the Herries saga Mr. Walpole was—I am

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sorry to say it—"nice." In some incredible fashion he even contrived to keep Maggie Trenchard—*née* Cardinal's—elopement with her lover "nice."

Taking them by and large, it is almost impossible to imagine a less volcanic collection of females than Mr. Walpole's young women. One receives the impression that they were injected in infancy with a powerful prophylactic against the aforementioned perilous quality upon which so much stress is laid in Hollywood. One feels that there is nothing of which they are not capable, save of stirring what, for some inscrutable reason, are known as the "baser" passions of mankind. They are, taking them on the whole, girls one would be glad to have by one's side in a motor accident, on a Channel crossing, after missing the last train from Victoria. In any moment of personal calamity—in any difficult or dire situation they would be admirable. Utterly reliable to correct one's proofs for the Press, to produce Vapex and hot whisky and lemon at the first threatenings of influenza, they would also accompany one very gallantly on a ten-mile walk, or loiter a summer's afternoon away without once making demands on one's emotional system. They are splendid comrades. I cannot even quite exempt my favourite Katherine Trenchard from this generalisation. When they fall in love they do it in so simple and direct a fashion that no one save a cad could take advantage of their weakness. They remain, in the best acceptance of the term, respectable. In fact, they command so much respect that one is bound to doubt the passion which, according to Mr. Walpole, they inspire. Now and again they are *cosy*; but as for glamour, as for that breath-taking, heart-dissolving femininity which charges the merest flicker of an eyelash belonging to one of the heroines of—say—Mr. Michael Arlen with sufficient voltage to kill at a hundred yards—you may seek for it in vain. At best, Mr. Walpole's girls are sweet young things, at worst, they are a discreet composite of feminine theory, seen through unmistakably Edwardian spectacles; in every instance they are fundamentally conventional and limited by their conventions, which are the conventions of pre-war England.

The one exception to this rule is Maggie Cardinal, who is (apart from the Herries women) Hugh Walpole's finest female creation.

Whither, denied of its legitimate focus, which is the heroine, are Mr. Walpole's readers to look for the romantic interest in his novels?

A very cursory perusal will discover the fact that all the romance, all the spiritual and physical beauty of Mr. Walpole's characters are personified in his young men. One can construct a list of charming young men as long as one's arm—a list headed, of course, by Harmer John, and including Tony Gale, Olva Dune, Charles Harkness, Henry Trenchard, Vladimir Shapkin, David Dunbar and Roddy Seddon, without pausing to draw a book from the shelves. These glowing young men live in one's memory. The women with whom they fall in love remain shadowy, mere contributory elements to the masculine charm. All the ardour, all the suspense, all the psychological intensity, all the romanticism that the average novelist pours into his heroine Mr. Walpole bestows upon his juvenile hero. The homosexuality of his romantic ideal is quite one of the most interesting and characteristic points of his writing. His young men are lovable, and they matter; his young women are likeable, and they are, with a few exceptions, dispensable. Their present, their future, does not trouble us; they will marry, they will be absorbed into their husbands' personalities, or they will remain single and fold family tradition to their sterile bosoms in place of a lover. Or they will become like *The Old Ladies*.

Romantically speaking, the heroine who cannot rouse vicariously a grand passion in the heart of the reader must proffer some other form of challenge before she fulfils her function as heroine. The fashionable heroine is no longer the *femme fatale*—a type which has become so far legendary that it is left, in the main, to kitchenmaid literature; but the woman of personality and character who makes a career for herself in a profession, in business or in the arts. The unoccupied young woman is, to-day, an anachronism in which it is difficult for the reader to take a protracted interest; she is apt to be a deadweight, dramatically valueless, unless her love affairs are lively enough to create

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interest in themselves. The woman with a career is a type which Mr. Walpole has never attempted; Millie Trenchard's experiment in secretaryship is, of course, a mere gesture; the rather irritating gesture of a young woman bored with her home and in no way dependent upon her earnings. All Mr. Walpole's young women seem tied to the apron-strings of the home, and either spend their time in looking after aged parents or fritter it away in the thousand and one aimless occupations of which a business woman has, mercifully, no conception. In short, Mr. Walpole's tacit assumption seems to be that men must work and women must weep, which is a strange one for a man working for so many years cheek by jowl with feminine rivals. The fact that he has never placed a woman among his literary characters might lead to the accusation that he did not believe in the power of women to rival masculine achievement in that line, were it not for Mr. Walpole's well-known generosity towards woman authors.

Yet this very unsatisfactoriness, thus dissected, brings us to the conclusion that, in spite of the lack of a truly romantic young heroine, we never miss her! So great is the power of the story-teller, so absorbing the remainder of his characters, that it is only in retrospect that one realises Mr. Walpole's limitation.

About his young heroes lies the glamour of:

"Beyond, beyond, beyond, there lies . . ."

In them is summarised all the delicacy and despair and ambition and will-to-achieve of youth; all its sensitive ecstasies, its diffidence and impudence and brave ignorance and adventuring. They are full of moonshine and dreams; one cannot help feeling tenderly towards them, even in their moments of folly and bombast one discerns beyond that weedy sapling which is Henry Trenchard, the growth of something tall and gracious and beautiful; beyond the scrubby little Peter Westcott, the development of some great, spreading British oak.

"The whole duty of Art is listening for the voice of God."

The voice of God is very near the ears of Hugh Walpole's young men—while his young women are lost in the cathedral.

CHAPTER FOUR

“CLOUD CUCKOO LAND”

SINCE the writer has been at such pains to define Mr. Walpole as a Romantic, it seems only fitting that, in pursuit of the definition, we should begin our study of his writings by those novels which express the Romantic *in excelsis*—the Treliss books, and that later romance, *Above the Dark Circus*, which, appearing immediately after the first volume of the Herries saga, was scorned of the critics; for critics, like theatrical managers, are, on the whole, deeply distrustful of whimsicality. *Above the Dark Circus* is a romantic refflorescence of Mr. Walpole's earlier manner: there is about it some suggestion of a macabresque Olympian jesting—and the critics do not like the gods to jest. Perhaps they have an uneasy suspicion that the joke is on themselves. Whatever may be the reason, *Above the Dark Circus*, which, incidentally, contains some of the best of Mr. Walpole's writing, and at least one episode of a poignancy uneclipsed in any other of his books (the vigil on the stairs beside the dead man), had but a chilly reception; it was, in fact, shrugged into obscurity, much as a tuft-hunter might shrug away a poor relation who had the temerity to accompany Rogue Herries into a gathering convened in honour of the latter. Part of my task, therefore, will lie in the attempt to redeem *Above the Dark Circus* from its (in the writer's opinion) unmerited obscurity.

The Treliss novels—*Maradick at Forty* and *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair*—are the fruits of Mr. Walpole's Cornish, as the Herries novels are the fruits of his Northumbrian, ancestry. For all the Faery of Treliss, it is clear that here is none of the

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superficiality of the novelist who spends from a month to six weeks in a place for the sake of "local colour." Nothing could be easier for such a one than to glaze his superstructure with a false romanticism no less nauseous and obvious to the expert than the *fausse antiquité* of a piece of Carolean faking. Mr. Walpole's supernaturals are born of the Cornish earth; they are there, unrevealed, but present to the inner eye—never more present than when circumstances appear to deny them—at every twist of a winding path, in every hollow of the downs, in gorse and sand dunes, on the cobbles of the town and gambolling like *poltergeisten* in the little windows of shops. Treliss is less a haunted town than a place of abnormality. It is a place where the abnormal becomes the normal, where life is defocused and human instinct runs amok; and in these two novels we are shown a group of human beings grappling with its influences.

We have the authority of Mr. Walpole for its situation in North Cornwall; one takes the morning train from Paddington and changes at Trewth. There is something slightly reassuring in recalling such mundane details. For Treliss is a town of enchantment—a place, one feels, only prevented from rising bodily and floating away on a cloud-bank by the trifling matter of a couple of hundred miles of railway line and the 10.45 from Paddington: a veritable Cloud Cuckoo Land of a place, that cloaks its Faery fabric so successfully in the bricks and mortar of a Cornish village that it deceives all save those who, like Mr. Walpole, are preternaturally wise. It is, perhaps, the spiritual counterpart of Helston, with whom it has more points of resemblance than the Furry Dance. For Treliss also has its Dance, of which, in both books, Mr. Walpole gives us a description.

In each case it has provoked from the author an excited, an even orgiastic piece of writing, reminiscent of the Hellenic dithyrambs, of the rapture of the Daphnephoria. It has all the flame and ardour of a pagan renaissance: one glimpses the extinction of "cold Christs and tangled trinities" in the triumph of the song of the merry-makers over the thin baa-ing of a religious fanatic:

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“ So like little candles
We shall shine,
You in your small corner
And I in mine.”

“ He threw his fork in the nearest ditch
And caught the maiden tightly, which
Was what she wanted him to do,
And so the same would all of you,
Tra-la-la-la-Tra-la! ”

In short, who has the least inclination to shine self-consciously like a little candle with the alternative of kissing a black-eyed Cornish maid ?

“ This dance round the town was *the* moment of the year. It was the one occasion on which no questions were asked and no surprise ever shown. Decorum and propriety, both excellent things, were for once flung aside: for unless they were discarded the spirit of the dance was not enjoyed. It was deeply symbolic; a glorious quarter of an hour into which you might fling all the inaction of the year—disappointment, revenge, jealousy, hate, went, like soiled and useless rags, into the seething pot, and were danced away for ever. You expressed, too, all your joy and gratitude for a delightful year and a most merry fair, and you drank in, as it were wine, encouragement and hope for the year to come. There had been bad seasons and disappointing friends, and the sad knowledge that you weren't as strong as you had once been; but into the pot with it all! Dance it away into limbo! And, on the back of that merry drum, sits a spirit that will put new heart into you and will send your toes twinkling down the street.

“ And then, best of all, it was a Dance of Hearts. It was the great moment at which certainty came to you, and, as you followed that drum down the curving street, you knew that the most wonderful thing in the world had come to you, and that you would never be quite the same person again; perhaps she had danced with you down the same street, perhaps she

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had watched you and listened to the drums, and known that there was no question any more."¹

Is this not the authentic spirit that lashed Pindar into his:

"Then, then are cast on the earth the lovely petals of pansies, and roses are in our hair?"

Thus the ardour of Mr. Walpole in 1910; in 1925 his ardour has suffered no diminishment—the magic of Treliss still has its way with him; but a new element is added to it.

"For a moment a marvellous silence fell.

"To Harkness this silence was exquisite. The myriad stars, the high buildings, their façades ruby-coloured with the leaping light, the dark piled background, the crowd humming now with quiet like water on the boil, the glow of rich suffused colour, sheltering everything with its beautiful cloak, the rich voices tossing into the air the jolly song, the sense of well-being and the tradition of the lasting old time and the spirit of England eternally fresh and sturdy and strong: all this sank into his very soul, and seemed to give him some hint of the deliverance that was, very soon, to come to him."²

That is the point of view of the American, Harkness; a point of view conditioned by his state of mind, and by the abnormal circumstances surrounding him. Thus, every year, on the sixth of August, Treliss strips itself of its familiar decorum, and allows those who are not too utterly steeped in material affairs a glimpse of its supernatural quality—a glimpse which, to those of us who know the place, is falsely reassuring: Treliss on its best behaviour, Treliss benign and beneficent, as though its old gods have been appeased for the nonce by the festivities which precede the Dance, and are content to sit, round-bellied, and beam upon mankind. On such an occasion one is apt to overlook the warning of the nameless old man whom Harkness meets in the train.

" ' You'd better look out for what you're reading, to whom you're speaking, where you're walking, what you're eating, everything, when you're in Treliss,' he remarked.

¹ *Maradick at Forty.*

² *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair.*

“ ‘ Why ? Is it so dangerous a place ? ’ asked Harkness.

“ ‘ It doesn’t like tourists. I’ve seen it do funny things to tourists in my time. ’ ”¹

The Punch and Judy man in *Maradick at Forty* defines the spirit of Treliss as the spirit of Youth: “ seeing things, you know, all freshly and with a new colour, always caring about things as if you’d met them for the first time.” He gives Maradick practically the same warning given by the unknown man to Harkness. “ It has its dangers, ’ specially when you take it suddenly; it’s like a fever, you know. And when it comes to *a gentleman of your age of life* and settled habits, well, it needs watching.”

I think *Maradick at Forty* is the youngest book I ever read in my life. Its youthfulness is summarised in the sentence which I have presumed to italicise—the sentence which presents the twenty-three-year-old author’s attitude towards the old gentleman of forty. Set such evidence of immaturity beside the work of young writers of the present day and the contrast is curious enough to provoke a smile, not at the naïveté of young Mr. Walpole, but at the pitiful post-war sophistications of his prototypes of the present day. At the same time it must be admitted that *Maradick at Forty* bubbles over with the raw enthusiasms and sentimentalities that made “ Elizabeth ” wince in Rügen. One feels that, had not his appointment to tutor the April, May and June babies terminated long before its publication, nor castle walls nor donjon keep would have held against the effects of his effervescence and “ Elizabeth’s ” reception of the same.

It is a much younger book than *The Wooden Horse*, with which Mr. Walpole had made his literary debut a year before. In the latter there is a certain caution, a well-preserved assumption of maturity (especially marked, as I have already said, in the character of Robin Trojan) which belies the writer’s youth, even although that becomes apparent in his failure to carry to their logical conclusion the premises which, in the persons of his

¹ *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair.*

characters, he has so clearly stated. But in *Maradick at Forty* the intoxication of being a Real, Live Author with a First Novel to his credit seems to have gone to the writer's head. He does not know what to do with himself for joy and excitement. "I've written a book! Isn't it gorgeous? And now I'm writing another—isn't it fun! Isn't it splendid!" The result is most disarming; it is as impossible not to like *Maradick* as it is not to like a retriever puppy which flings itself against one's legs in an ecstasy of playfulness. And of it, this at least remains to be said: that it is not possible that some good should not come from such overwhelming zeal.

The true importance of *Maradick* lies, obviously, in its function as a stepping-stone: and not only as a stepping-stone but as a signpost, which showed unerringly the way in which Mr. Walpole proposed to travel. In *Maradick* we have the first indications of elements which time has taught us to look for in all the Walpole novels. This first essay in the supernatural, so crude, so callow and limited in its forms of expression, is but the preparation for the grand macabre achievement of the *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair*, which came fifteen years later to round off the story. The *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair* is to *Maradick at Forty* as a skein of fine silk to a knotted cord; in it you will find no incoherences, no fumbings after this and that—no uncertainty; *Maradick* is very uncertain indeed: there are moments when one suspects that the young writer is not positive what he is driving at, but hopes that by keeping on he will find out. He does not always succeed.

In *Maradick at Forty* Mr. Walpole declares his allegiance to the Hawthorne tradition in giving out unmistakably that note of symbolism which echoes in crescendo through his later works: a symbolism typically romantic in form and of a twofold nature: one part operating in the direction of the embodiment of abstract quality in human form, which is direct, elementary and Bunyanesque symbolism, and the other in the direction of the use of inanimate objects to focus the emotions of human beings.

Good and Evil; here are the characters of a Morality play, of

the *Pilgrim's Progress*, of Grimm's Fairy Tales. Walpole presents them in his own idiom, that is to say, through his own symbol, but they are no more mistakable than their older prototypes. There is something Gothic about them; the shadows of their grey stone images lie across the pages of the Walpole novels, although, as his art develops, it is interesting to observe how Mr. Walpole learns to disguise them.

In the three books under our immediate consideration—*Maradick at Forty*, *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair*, and *Above the Dark Circus*—we have Evil made flesh in the persons of Morelli, Crispin and Pengelly: and just as there are three characters to symbolise it, so there are three evils: for the evil of Morelli is not the evil of Crispin, and the ignoble evil of Pengelly bears no relation to the majestic evil of the Man with Red Hair.

The evil of Morelli is primeval evil: it is the evil of elemental beings, the evil of the hairy denizens of sombre woods since time began: an evil of faun and satyr, of Nature itself, of a vast inimical Power before which that of the Galilean fails. It is evil without the element of malice, an evil of inevitability, it is Nature killing Nature.

The evil of Crispin is sheer diabolism: it is perverted good—the worst kind of evil, perhaps. It is evil with a purpose, driven by the immense motive force of intellectual conviction. The element of malice is there, but only in so far as its author seeks to punish those who will not conform to his monstrous theory of making men as gods.

And the evil of Pengelly is the lowest, most slimy and unjustifiable of all evil, with malice as its essence.

“When he spoke of Pengelly a sort of disgusting atmosphere crept about us, the air seemed to darken, the warmth of the sun to glow less kindly.”¹

Such a passage is apt to betray one into the truism that authors in general are more successful in depicting evil than good. This schoolroom generalisation seems to be borne out by Mr. Walpole's creation of Punch in *Maradick*, who is a failure in so far

¹ *Above the Dark Circus*.

that he is inconsistent. One feels that many of Punch's pronouncements—as, for example, his exposition of the character of Morelli—are beyond the intellectual scope of a man in his position. It was left to Mr. Walpole's maturity to produce the supreme symbol of Good in Harmer John.

Cruelty is the link which joins these three diverse types of evil together: the cruelty of Morelli in the strangling of a kitten, the cruelty of Crispin in his insane need to inflict pain upon Harkness, the cruelty of Pengelly in his insidious attack upon the moral forces of his victims. Cruelty may be said to be the major vice of Hugh Walpole's characters; and in this connection it may be interesting to trace back the writer's evident obsession with the horror of cruelty to his juvenile experiences at his first school, when all of human evil must have summarised itself to him in the one vice of cruelty—mental, moral and physical. But whereas Morelli's cruelty is the cruelty of nature, and Crispin's has the majesty of his convictions, Pengelly's is the hideous small creeping cruelty of a miniscular mind.

The second form of symbolism—that which uses inanimate objects to focus the emotions of human beings—had hardly been discovered by Mr. Walpole when he wrote *Maradick at Forty*. It was to break out in full force in his next book, *Mr. Perrin and Mr. Traill*, which may be characterised as Hugh Walpole's epic of hate. In "the battle of the umbrella" and in the various incidents that take place about "the red and yellow china man," he discovers to us the psychological importance of a material focus for an intangible devil. To pursue investigation even farther afield, he makes notable use of this literary device in May Beringer's red amber dragon, the material focus of so much spiritual warfare in *The Old Ladies*.

In *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair* he forsakes the device temporarily, but in *Above the Dark Circus* the idea pervades the entire book: everything seems to be part of a monstrous purpose, illustrative of a mental attitude of one or another of his characters. There is meaning in the position of a candlestick, in the altitude of a building, in a light on the stairs—meaning, that is

to say, beyond their dramatic significance; one feels that they are conditioned by the minds of the protagonists of the drama.

To return to Treliss.

Maradick at Forty cannot possibly be accounted among the important representations of Hugh Walpole's literary genius, but it is curious how it sticks in the memory: rather as one remembers the attractive childish antics of a gifted youngster who has fulfilled his youthful promise. Because one is fond of young things—of kittens, puppies, willow catkins and the first buds of crocuses that thrust their brave spikes through the frost-bitten earth before winter has gone—one must be fond of *Maradick*. The ebullience of youth bubbles tiresomely yet irresistibly from every page, yet it is not without a certain workmanlike structure of plot and underplot, revealed through the unanalytical eyes of a very young man, very much in love with life and tremendously sorry for anyone who does not share his transports! Not the least charm of the book lies in the fact that both plot and under-plot, both whiskered and hoary, are presented with the bounding conviction of unsophistication.

Maradick at forty (who, as Miss Clemence Dane points out, is really Maradick at fifty), handicapped by romantic leanings and a little vulgar suburban wife, comes to Treliss in pursuit of his youth, which he proceeds to chase in two directions, one, vicariously, through the romantic passion of Tony Gale for Janet Morelli, and the other *in propria personæ* in a rather painfully commonplace flirtation with a neurotic married lady—for both of which he blames Treliss. Mr. Walpole also intends us to blame Treliss, but one is forced to the conclusion that the same might have happened at Epsom, or Eastbourne, or Folkestone, had circumstances combined to throw Mr. Maradick into the society of a Tony Gale or a Milly Lester. The world is full of James Maradicks, who, after twenty years of marriage to ladies of moral virtue, physical charm but intellectual limitation, wake up on a spring morning to the conviction that they have missed something—they know not what—and hastily resolve to indulge in a little harmless gallivanting from which—since

man is a creature of habit—they soon recover: for the Milly Lesters who are also, let us admit it, thick as blackberries in September, set too hard a pace and are too alarmingly specific in their demands for a man in Maradick's situation, whose last wish on earth is to make decisions or to swim the Hellespont in which he has been so agreeably dabbling his toes. So, reluctantly, for by doing so we deprive the young author of one half of his argument, we must refuse to accept the complicity of Treliss in the personal affairs of James Maradick, it is only when he rashly engages himself in the drama of Tony Gale that it begins to take an interest in his existence.

In the underplot Mr. Walpole introduces to us the most vital character of the book—Morelli; who, although in a sense supernatural, is, paradoxically, quite the most convincing of the rest of Mr. Walpole's people; and this in spite of the fact that his character reveals some startling inconsistencies, from which one may take leave to deduce some of that uncertainty, already referred to, on the part of his creator.

Tony Gale meets his fate in this guise:

"Suddenly above their heads there was a light. A window was flung up and someone was standing there with a candle. It was a girl; in the candlelight she stood out brilliantly against the black background. She leaned out of the window.

" 'Is that you, father?' she called."¹

What an incident to follow, at midnight, the orgy of the Dance! Tony, already in a state of spiritual exaltation, sees in it a miracle. He is, one must admit, a young gentleman of miracles, of ardours, of excitements—very much the sort of person that Mr. Walpole himself seems to have been in his first year at Cambridge. And Janet with her candle goes to his head. A pity, for her sake, that it had never occurred to Alice du Cane to lean out of an upper window of the Man at Arms, a candle in her hand. . . . Tony's impetuosity sweeps Maradick into a formal call upon Morelli, the father of his Lady with a Candle, whose acquaintance they have previously made. And Morelli is Treliss.

¹ *Maradick at Forty.*

It is in connection with him that Treliss as Treliss reveals itself. Whatever scepticism the reader may so far have entertained, in regard to the supernatural properties of the town, it vanishes in connection with Morelli, who is emphatically one of its pagan deities, one of the creatures from which it derives its reputation. And when we (and Maradick) first meet Morelli, he is obviously under the beneficent influence of the festival, his sinister side is in abeyance, appeased by the incense of his votaries.

The first inconsistency in the character of Morelli lies in his fatherhood of so fundamentally normal a daughter as Janet.

The Ferdinand-and-Miranda idyll of this young woman who has never before met anyone of her own age derives all its credibility from the figure of Morelli, that curious blend of pagan cruelty and tenderness. Why did he allow the friendship between Ferdinand-Tony and Miranda-Janet to develop, if he meant nothing to come of it? Here Mr. Walpole seems to miss an essential point in Morelli's paganism; for one is convinced that had these two contented themselves with becoming lovers, the Pan-Hellenic spirit of Morelli would have accepted the situation, which would not have interfered with the tune upon the flute. Tony might have possessed Janet among the primroses, while Morelli summoned the woodland folk with his little tune to witness the primitive nuptials of this *après midi d'un faune*! Unfortunately, there is nothing of the faun about Tony Gale, who is simply a bouncing young lover, self-consciously youthful and fundamentally "public school," who offends the Morellian creed by his insistence upon matrimony with the equally commonplace Janet. Morelli's bourgeois peevishness at Lady Gale's not having called upon him and his daughter (visiting cards in Enna mead!) is quite the most incredible thing about his character, for which one may either criticise the author, or credit him with allowing Morelli a certain Puckish glee in assuming these antics of society for the better concealment of his Pan identity. A man who has sat on a hillock to pipe the rabbits and squirrels to his feet in one mood, and in another has wrung the necks of the inoffensive beasts, whose wife has died, to put it

mildly, in suspicious circumstances, and who takes malicious revenge on a critic by killing his dog, does not strike one as likely to take offence because the wife of an English baronet has withheld the social gesture.

And this is one of the points wherein, as I have said, the young author does not seem quite certain of what he is driving at; or perhaps he was self-conscious. There are evidences of a singular bashfulness in several passages of the book.

What was Prospero's object in arranging the shipwreck? Was his mind busy about marriage settlements and the solemnisation of matrimony for his only daughter? Was not his desire that his daughter should fulfil herself as a woman? Is that not the real object of Morelli's entertainment of Tony Gale? If not, why the raising of the embargo of isolation, why the complaisance of the duenna, why the conniving at the *solitude à deux*?

" 'Dear Miss Morelli,

" 'Your father suggested this afternoon that you might come for a row one day.' "1

(The italics are my own.) If Morelli had intended *The Voice that breathed o'er Eden*, orange blossoms and white satin for his Janet (grotesque assumption) he would not have turned out his young ignorant daughter to the company of a virtual stranger. But he intended nothing of the sort. He had no desire to lose Janet, his object was to lure Tony into their pagan relationship, and, being a pagan, he knew what this would mean. "Don't mind feeling intensely, hurting intensely, loving intensely. It is a world of emotion, not of sham," he told Janet. And—

" 'There were gods once,' he said. 'People were faithful in those days, and they saw clearly. Now the world is gloomy, because of the faults it thinks that it has committed, or because pleasure has been acid to the taste. Then they came with their songs and flowers to the hill, and, with the sky at their head and the sea at their feet, they praised the god whom they knew. Now'—he stared fiercely in front of him—'Oh! these mortals!' he said."2

¹ *Maradick at Forty*.

² *Ibid*.

He means Tony to be the vehicle for the removal of Janet's sexual ignorance, and it is on account of this ignorance and the imperative need for its removal that the liaison is encouraged. It was not grief at the loss of Janet that drove him at Maradick's throat in that murky battle on the night of the elopement: it was the rage of Nature at its frustration by the vulgar misapprehensions of suburban minds; it was the Pan-Hellenic frenzy at the profanation of Nature's rites by the intervention of an *arriviste* ritual at which the older gods scoff.

This, at least, is how I read Morelli, a reading based on Punch's definition of his character:

"'Morelli's not a man, nor anything real at all. 'E's just a kind of vessel through which emotions pass, if you understand me. The reason, in a way, that 'e expresses Nature is because nothing stays with him. 'E's cruel, 'e's loving, 'e's sad, 'e's happy, just like Nature, because the wind blows, or the rivers run, or the rains fall. 'E's got influence over everything human because 'e isn't 'uman 'imself. 'E isn't a person at all, 'e's just an influence, a current of atmosphere in a man's form.'"

In spite of the dropped aspirates, one cannot accept this, and the following paragraphs as representing the point of view of a Punch and Judy man; at least, it is not the point of view with which one quarrels, so much as with the form of its expression. And yet—if one can accept Morelli, why not Punch?

"Just like Nature." That is Morelli; he *is* Nature. That is why we can accept him and believe in him, while Alice du Cane, the Lesters and the rest of the Gale family, with the exception perhaps of Lady Gale, fail to convince us. They seem profoundly unnecessary to the story, which is Morelli, Morelli and Morelli. It is for Morelli that Trelliss exists and has its being, and Maradick, in his physical victory over him at the last, symbolises the victory of Mansoul over brute Nature. One feels that the sinister influence of Morelli was behind his affair with Milly Lester, and that, with the victory over Morelli, Maradick has put an end to all that, and has mastered his baser instincts.

"CLOUD CUCKOO LAND"

It is an idyllic ending: Tony happy with his Janet, Maradick restored peacefully to his Emmy and his pink-faced daughters, the Gales reconciled to their son's marriage. An atmosphere of peace lies upon it.

"It is twilight. The cove is sinking with its colours into the evening mists. The sea is creeping very gently over the sand, that shines a little with the wet marks that the retreating tide has left.

"The rocks, the hills, the town, rise behind the grey mysterious floor that stretches without limit into infinite distance in black walls sharply outlined against the night blue of the sky.

"There is only one star. Some sheep are crying in a fold.

"A cold wind passes like a thief over the sand. The sea creeps back, relentlessly, ominously . . . eternally."¹

An exquisite ending to a book whose chief merit lies in its youthful ardour and idealism. In real life would Emmy Maradick have said, "I'm going to be different"? Would Tony and Janet, that oddly assorted couple, have found domestic felicity in their Chelsea flat? What does it matter? The writer believed profoundly that they would; we catch the infection of his belief.

And meanwhile Treliss crouches there, a moribund witch, waiting for its next victims.

With *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair* we enter upon new ground. First of all, we are *vis-à-vis* with a writer who has conquered his medium, who has the essence of his craft at his command: no longer an experimentalist. In this most accomplished piece of work Hugh Walpole reveals himself as a romanticist of the first order, and as something more: as one whose knowledge of human beings is no longer limited to the empirical, but has probed into the deep shameful abyss which no man will acknowledge, but which exists behind the façade of social decency and convention.

¹ *Maradick at Forty*.

It is a fearful book, and yet a book which Mr. Walpole professes to have found relaxation in writing. In it he escaped from the tiresome materialisms of an American lecture tour to his Cloud Cuckoo Town to which, weary of probabilities, the mind of the romantic returns like a homing pigeon. Its link with materialism consists in the fact that it was commissioned and then rejected with horror by an American publisher. This also accounts for the fact that this tale of mystery and horror unfolds itself round the personality of a young American; and on the whole it is not surprising that it created consternation in the minds of the publishers who, no doubt expecting one of Mr. Walpole's grand, grey, cathedral histories, were slapped in the face with this confidential report from an alienist's case-book: which actually is what it amounts to. That, at least, is what it amounts to, superficially, and Mr. Walpole, in his preface, requests that we shall take it superficially, that is to say, at face value, which is as a tale of extraordinary frightfulness and of so absorbing an interest that, on beginning it, one is bound to read to its conclusion. The difficulty of accepting it at Mr. Walpole's valuation lies in the fact that his other writings have educated us to look for the story behind the story, in other words, to see in the story itself the symbol of Mr. Walpole's real intention.

The danger of this attitude of the mind lies in the disposition to assume symbol where no symbol is intended, to overlook the wood for the trees. Obviously Crispin stands for Evil, Hesther for Good, and Harkness for the human battle-ground on which the two influences wage their war to the death. Beyond that it were wiser not to go, in this *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair*, lest one find oneself face to face with some frightfulness too great for mortal mind to survive the encounter. Here we have Madness, Fog and a White Tower: if that is not sinister enough for the average mind it is difficult to imagine how much more is required.

““ Do you *want* adventure, romance, something that will pull you right out of yourself and test you, show you whether you *are* real or no, give you a crisis that will change you for

ever?"¹ inquire no longer Mr., but Sir James, Maradick (how charmed Emmy must have been) of the young American, Harkness, within the first few pages of the book. One feels it is a little thoughtless of Maradick, because he *knows*. And Harkness accepts the challenge.

He is a gentle soul, this American young man, with his Aldegrevers and his Penczs, his little Japanese fisherman in coloured ivory, and his fine manners: spiritual descendant of Don Quixote, predestined lamb to the Crispinian slaughter. Frankly, I find Harkness one of the most lovable of Hugh Walpole's gallery of young men, second only in regard to my beloved Henry Trenchard, of whom much hereafter. He has the same gentleness, the same rather desperate and splendid courage, the same forlorn idealism and intensive craving after beauty, all of which virtues only serve to expose him more completely to the diabolism of Crispin.

Armed with his St. Gilles, Marais, Whistler, Strang and Meryon, Don Quixote-Harkness catches, we assume, the 10.45 from Paddington—*facilis descensus Averni*—and arrives in due course at that very Man at Arms Hotel which had staged the Maradick-Gale drama of fifteen years previous. Long ere that the magic of Trelliss has caught him in its perilous net; has trapped him into that meeting with young David Dunbar which is but the preliminary—so deceptively innocent—to more sinister happenings.

Ordinarily I dislike sequels: the *Portrait* is only a sequel in the sense that it makes use of a setting previously used, and I admit to a certain thrill as I walked up the steep Trelliss street from which "the houses fell away" to the Man at Arms. Here again is Mr. Bannister, here the familiar bow windows through which the scent of roses is reinforced by the hundred thousand phantoms of roses of other days. Upstairs is the Minstrels' Gallery, where James Maradick sat and puzzled over his sentiments for Milly Lester. One knows it all. . . . One is a little afraid because one knows it all. . . .

¹ *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair.*

And here Don Quixote-Harkness has his second encounter: or, rather, overhears the sound which is as the clear call to arms for him and his kind—a woman weeping, imploring a man who is evidently her husband to let her go away, to allow her to make her escape from some nameless terror which overwhelms her.

Here is the true beginning of the tale, to which his meeting with David Dunbar is but the prelude. Events now move swiftly until Harkness is in possession of the story of Hesther Crispin and her hapless love for Dunbar, to the service of which Harkness altruistically dedicates himself, for he has seen the Terror which is driving Hesther on to the dark and doubtful border line from which, once passed, there is no return.

The description of the Red-Haired Man is one of the finest pieces of literary virtuosity which the writings of Mr. Walpole afford. Harkness—

“ had never before seen such red hair or so white a face. . . . The man’s hair was *en brosse*, standing straight on end as Loge’s used to do in the old pre-war Bayreuth ‘ Ring.’ . . . *une tête glabre*—the forehead glaring like a challenge, the red hair springing from it like something alive of its own independence. . . . The colour of the face had an unnatural pallor . . . like one of Benda’s masks . . . through the mask the eyes were alive and beautiful, dark, tender, eloquent, but spoilt because above them the eyebrows were so faint as to be scarcely visible. The mouth in the white of the face was a thin, hard, red scratch. The eyes stared into the garden. The body soon painted itself into the window behind it, the round short limbs, the shining shoes, the little black pearl in the gleaming shirt.”¹

The description, even in this mutilated form—for which I beg forgiveness of Mr. Walpole—is rich enough to form material for a portrait painter. A few lines later we learn that the Man with Red Hair had a beautiful voice—“ soft, exquisitely melodious, with an inflection in it of friendliness, courtesy and culture

¹ *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair.*

that was enchanting. Absolutely without affectation." A fallen angel. One shudders, with Harkness, at the thought of Hesther helpless in the hands of such a one, and of her husband, the hideous, the inhuman Herrick Crispin, awful outcome of his father's experiments.

"His opening gambits are always the same. He offered me a cigarette and I took one. We talked for a little. I didn't like him at first, of course, with his hair, white face, painted lips; but—did you notice what a beautiful voice he has?"

The Dance through the Town brings Harkness and Dunbar together again: cements more closely their relationship. Harkness is formally pledged to the rescue of Hesther from the White Tower and the monsters who threaten her with their sinister designs. In the conversation which takes place inside the Feathered Duck Dunbar affords Harkness a glimpse of the devil which possesses Crispin—seen through a glass darkly, for neither young man understands the diabolism behind the ugly little story of the old woman at Haxt who has furnished material for one of Crispin's experiments. "The benefit of suffering so that you could touch life at its fullest!"

"Suddenly Crispin took hold of her wrinkled old neck and began stroking it, putting his face close to hers, talking, talking, talking all the time. Then the Jap stepped behind her, caught the back of her head and pulled it."¹

Almost Crispin, with his emerald ring, his collection, his Japanese servants, his wealth, charm and sinister occupations transcends for a moment the reader's credulity. But only for a moment. One realises that here is a madman, only saved from the fate of lunacy by his wealth and the extraordinary loyalty and devotion of his son Herrick. So devoted is this miserable creature to his father that he is willing to offer up even the woman he has married to the older man's insatiable desires. The situation is a hideous one, and Mr. Walpole spares us none of its horror. But it is only when Harkness comes face to face with

¹ *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair.*

Crispin, after that wastefully lovely piece of writing quoted in the first chapter, over his collections, that one glimpses the deadly logic and reasoning power which govern the activities of the Man with Red Hair.

The preparation for this scene is admirable: the Crispins and Harkness drive out to the White Tower in Crispin's car. Crispin has proffered his invitation on the strength of their mutual interest in etchings; Harkness has accepted because it furthers his intention to keep an eye on Hesther, and now, as things turn out, his entrance into the White Tower is an essential move in his recently formulated plan with David Dunbar to rescue Hesther.

The drive in the car is a masterly example of Hugh Walpole's power of obscene suggestion.

"Then a curious thing happened. Through the darkness, Harkness felt one of the fingers of Crispin's left hand creeping like an insect about his knee. They were sitting very closely together in the car's enclosure. Harkness was conscious that Hesther Crispin was pressed, almost crouching, against the corner of the car, and although the stuff of her dress touched him he was aware that she was striving desperately that he should not be aware of her proximity, and then, directly after that, of why she was so striving—it was because she was shivering—shivering in little spasms and tremors that shook her from head to foot—and she was wishing that he should not realise this.

"And even as he caught from her the consciousness of her trembling, at the same moment he was aware of the pressing of Crispin's finger upon his knee . . . and soon it began its movement, staying for an instant, pressing through the cloth on to the bone of the knee, then moving very slowly up the thigh, the sharp finger-nail suddenly pushing more firmly into the flesh, then the finger relaxing again and making only a faint, tickling, creeping suggestion of a pressure. . . .

"When Harkness was first conscious of this he tried to move his knee, but he was so tightly wedged in that he could not stir. Then he could not move for another reason, that he

was transfixed with apprehension. It was exactly as though a gigantic hand had slipped forward and enclosed him in its grasp, congealing him there, stiffening him into helpless clay—and this was the apprehension of immediate physical pain.”¹

After this period the reader, as well as Harkness, is anæsthetised into taking for granted all that follows: Crispin’s suave demonstration of his treasures, the web of courtesies which this monstrous man-spider weaves about his intended victim. It takes something of a shock to bring one out of this anæsthesia, and this shock is administered sharply with Crispin’s sudden exposition of his creed. It is more than exposition, it is a justification; it brings the element of pity confusingly into our revulsion.

“ ‘Do you believe in God, Mr. Harkness?’ and the draught went whispering on hands and feet round the room, ‘Do you believe in God, Mr. Harkness?’

“ ‘Yes,’ said Harkness.

“ ‘Yes,’ said Crispin, in his lovely, melodious voice; ‘but in a good God, a sweet God, a kind, beneficent God. That is no God. God is first cruel, terrible, lashing, punishing. Then when He has punished enough, and the victim is in His power, bleeding at His feet, owning Him as Lord and Master, then He bends down and lifts the wounded brow and kisses the torn mouth, and in His heart there is a great and mighty triumph. . . . Even so will I do, even so will I be . . . and greater than God Himself!’ ”²

Through Pain, he proceeds to elucidate, one reaches Power. It is the conclusion of one who has lived for so long familiar with pain that the beauty and grandeur of pain have become an obsession. It is the philosophy of a man who has suffered physically and spiritually from childhood. We see a soul, crucified by derision, entering into its infernal kingdom through the savage gateway of physical torment:

“ I was fifteen years of age. He stripped me naked and made me bleed. It was terribly cold, and I came in that bare

¹ *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair.* ² *Ibid.*

room right into the very heart of life, into the heart of the heart, where the true meaning is at last revealed."

"God—of whose existence no thinking man can truly permit himself to doubt—have you ever thought, Mr. Harkness, that the whole of His power is derived from the pain He inflicts upon those less powerful than himself?"¹

The abstract quality of this reasoning breaks down pitifully at the end:

"Do you think me so stupid? Absurd, with my ridiculous hair, my ugly body? Oh, I know! You can't hide it from me. You laugh like the rest. Secretly, you laugh. . . .

"If my fingers were at your throat, at your breast, and you could not move but must wait my wish, my plan for you, would you then think me so absurd—my figure, my hair, ridiculous? You would be as though in the hands of a god. I should be as a god to you to do with you what I wished. . . ."²

Nothing in the book is quite so vital as this chapter; in it one is shown not only a mind in torture, but under a microscope, its most intimate agonies, the ugly processes of its disruption. It reeks of evil; Harkness is choked by its vile effluvia, and at the same time sick with pity. For here is a soul avid of beauty, yet terrified of it: so terrified that, in tearing to pieces the Orvieto, it cries out:

"What would happen to me if I surrendered to all that beauty?"

It is a majestic chapter, the Prince of Darkness rides its thunder, and the soul of Harkness cowers.

More than ever it has become necessary that the rescue of Hesther shall take place at once, before Crispin's "tutelage" has time to take place. And here we behold the altruism of Harkness cracking, for by this time Harkness is in love with her, and he and his second self are engaged in the weary warfare of pride, decency (to his friend Dunbar) and loyalty against self-indulgence.

¹ *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair.* ² *Ibid.*

"CLOUD CUCKOO LAND"

The rescue of Hesther, their flight into the fog, and the heart-rending manner of their recapture follow. In the description of the fog the Romantic takes charge. There is personality in the fog, it is a witch-element, it is Treliss itself, so long the complacent onlooker at the Crispin drama, now impatiently aware that the drama is to be cheated of its climax, unless it intervenes. It is lovely, capricious, cruel, playing cat and mouse with the lovers and their friend; it allows itself to be the element by which the spirit of Crispin is projected; its ingenious torments are such as he himself might, in a subtle mood, have devised: for to begin with "the sea-mist was very faint, blowing in little wisps like tattered lawn, not obscuring anything but rendering the whole scene ethereal and unreal." It plays a comedy of connivance, only to change to an antic hey round the figure of Harkness, the recipient of its richest spite; it chokes him, it bemuses him, it scares him with phantom forms, it pretends to lighten, only to gather again, until contemptuously with an echo of spectral laughter, it flings its victims into the very jaws of their fate once more.

The final scene—the one in the White Tower, with Harkness physically at the mercy of Crispin and his Japanese servants—is the scene of Harkness's triumph, not over Crispin, although there is a poignant moment when the drowning good in Crispin's soul drifts towards the surface in response to some word of Harkness's, only to sink for ever out of sight: but over Treliss, over witchcraft, over the powers of darkness, over himself, over his love for Hesther, over his physical cowardice. In the very face of death by torture this bright idealist can cry:

"I've touched life at last! I'm alive. I can never die any more . . . Hesther, never lose courage. Remember that he can't touch you, that no one can touch you. You're your own immortal mistress."¹

And afterwards:

"All was peace. The rustling whisper of the sea, the breeze moving through the taller grasses, the hum of tiny

¹ *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair.*

insects, a lark singing, two dogs barking in rivalry, a scent of herb and salt and fashioned soil—all these things were peace.”¹

Treliss in coma after its convulsion; quiet, harmless, benignant for a while!

Treliss shoulders responsibility for the affairs of Harkness as it never shoulders them for those of Maradick. Treliss is the battle-ground on which a young man wins his spurs; on which he rejects such worn-out trappings as sentimentality, self-consciousness, egotism, and physical fear. Treliss laid its spell upon him in the Dance; Treliss has shown him heaven and hell, and from both he has learned that God is the only reality and that beauty is the path to God.

Within the first ten pages of *Above the Dark Circus* the reader meets with the device to which I have already referred in the earlier part of this chapter—the use of inanimate objects to focus the emotions of human beings.

“High on the wall of the Avenue was a goblet of gold that rose slowly, tilted itself, awkwardly, and then ejected some liquid with an air of quite ridiculous self-satisfaction.

“The reflection of its gold and crimson shone dully in the dead windows behind me—the reflection was sulky and vengeful, as though the windows were angry and sullen at the use to which they were being put. Not only did these lights seem to have some especial personal meaning for me, but also for the people who were passing on every side of me. The Circus was only moderately crowded, but I noticed that everyone was clinging to the pavement as though a step forward meant ruin.”²

But the Circus itself is the real focus; it is the crystallisation of Osmund’s tragedy, the tragedy of a romantic idealist maddened by post-war conditions which have cast out both romance and ideals. In it Osmund sees the symbol of man’s reduction to his lowest common denominator, the less-than-man, the machine,

¹ *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair.*

² *Above the Dark Circus.*

the thing manipulated in the hand of an *über-marionette* to play its part in the God-plan, the negation of soul, of spirit, of man's proper self. The Circus is Osmund's personal enemy: it is his dual self, the devil side of him warring against the god side.

One has to remember that the story is related from the viewpoint of a starving man; any exaggerations, any obliquity of vision, a disposition to see men as trees walking are accounted for in Richard Gunn's debonair choice between steak and kidney and a hair-cut.

"One chimney seemed like a swollen and doubly malevolent Pengelly. It wore exactly that look of evil, listening attention that Pengelly had just now worn."¹

And in Pengelly we meet with Hugh Walpole's third type of Evil: that most degraded type that battens on the moral sensitiveness of its victims. Pengelly is a blackmailer, and the battle between him and Osmund is the battle *à outrance* between Realism at its ugliest and Romanticism at bay.

Osmund's trouble is that he is a spiritual aristocrat in a plebeian world. There is something taurian about his character, his insolence, his disastrous rages: some latent *Weltschmerz* that drives him into such dubious society as that of Buller, with his odd hangers-on, Hench and Pengelly. It is no society for a gentleman; but the company of his equals cannot alone appease the soul-sickness with which modern conditions have infected him. He seeks their society as a drunken man, becoming aware of his condition, may drink more deeply to drown his self-contempt. His own nature is a battle-ground for his innate romanticism and his furious recognition of the powers of realism. He lives in perpetual turmoil, in continuous rage. He admits in that last tragic conversation with his wife that he has "never been on proper terms with this life." He is worn out, his temper broken, with the continual search for a beauty that is not to be captured by such as he; he is like a butterfly catcher, cheated time and again of his prize by his own impatience, his headlong clumsiness. He has lost faith.

¹ *Above the Dark Circus.*

was a man, propped up in its corner, while in the half light the guests at a fancy-dress party on the floor above flit up and down. It is a scene of shadow play, of hysteria, reminding me of a curious morbid play once seen at the Théâtre des Oeuvres—*Carine, Jeune Fille Folle de son Ame*. It seems as though every creature that moves on this night above the dark Circus is touched with this madness, and it is Osmund who, pre-eminently, is soul-mad.

And here, one might assume (knowing nothing of that Pengellian transaction aforementioned) the story ends: with Buller undertaking the disposal of the corpse, poetic justice satisfied, and the world well rid of a predatory scoundrel whose death is an act of mercy to thousands: with a suitable interval of suspense, perhaps, to carry out the tradition, and the acquittal of the hero, because heroes cannot be allowed to suffer the death penalty. That, at least, is how it might end, if this story were merely what, in its beginnings, it promises to be, a "thriller." And in that case, gentle reader, as you succinctly remark, what would become of the underplot?—the underplot, which is Dick Gunn's love for Helen, the wife of Osmund.

" ' I beg your pardon. Is this Mr. Osmund's flat ? ' "

" ' Yes. I am Mr. Osmund. ' "

" ' Oh, thank you. I beg your pardon for disturbing you. My name is Pengelly. ' " ¹

Thus the second round of the contest announces itself, with the modest entrance of the small, plump Pickwickian, younger Pengelly. A bland, mild, amiable creature: *de luxe* edition of his brother. Pengelly, cosy in his new quarters: certain, at last, that this time his prey shall not escape.

It is time, at last, for us to turn to the underplot.

Its interest lies, for me, in the fact that it centres round the character of Helen Osmund, for whom Mr. Walpole claims the title of heroine; and I do not think that many will be found to dispute that title. Here we have the full-length portrait of an

¹ *Above the Dark Circus.*

attractive, courageous and lovable young woman, sane, as Mr. Walpole's heroines invariably are sane, yet with sufficient madness about her to subject her own will to that of the man whom she illogically loves. For Helen Cameron should never have fallen in love with John Osmund. Or she might have fallen in love and fallen out again, without disastrously committing herself to marriage. Had he allowed it, she might have been his good angel; but he bound and dragged her, adoring, at his chariot wheel, until the adoration passed into fear. She watched, trembling, the disaster brought upon them by his heroic impulses; she walked with him in the shadow of Pengelly, and only at the end, when Osmund had done the impossible thing, did her constancy break down.

It is almost impossible to define the difference which lies between Helen Osmund and the rest of Mr. Walpole's "heroines." All of them are fine women; Maggie Cardinal showed an equal loyalty, Katherine Trenchard an equal decision. Helen is not as grand as either of these; it is unlikely that anyone will remember her as a Walpole heroine. She fits into her place in the story, fills it admirably, without arrogance and without pretension. It may be that moment when she says to Gunn:

" ' My life, Dick, has been passing from one mad moment to the other, but always someone else's madness. ' "

It may be no more than an emanation from the mind of her creator. Hugh Walpole had just finished *Rogue Herries*; in it, like Samson, he had burst the bonds of his creative limitation. Helen is the product of the Herries frame of mind; she is free of parochialism, and although her love story is practically compressed into a chapter, it is a vital part of the book's interest.

From the moment when Osmund finds out the situation between her and Gunn the end is clear. All of his life Osmund has been fighting, but with this final defeat the will to fight deserts him. Realism has dealt him the knock-out, and it only remains for the Romantic to make the gesture of farewell. The Circus has conquered; he is its victim in a spiritual as well as in a

material sense, in that moment when, with Pengelly in his arms, he plunges over the roof-tops into the whirls of the snow and the lights; and as his soul flits squeaking into hell he takes his lesser enemy with him to pursue, maybe, their shadowy warfare among the shades.

Above the Dark Circus is a dark, a melancholy book, which one lays down with a sense of awakening from a nightmare. There is in it little of the optimism which characterises the work of its author. It would be out of place to psychologise about it, to probe it for the hidden meaning which, some people like to pretend, lies behind all Mr. Walpole's writings. Why so lucid a writer as Hugh Walpole should be subjected to this dissective ardour on the part of some of his admirers I find it difficult to understand. Like all good writers, he employs a formula which, once accepted, is the key-note to the majority of his writings. But once in a while he writes a perfectly plain, straightforward tale like *Above the Dark Circus*, and, for some reason or other, certain people turn peevish. Why, if Mr. Walpole chooses to provide us with an entertainment, should one grumble because it does not happen to be a novel in the grand manner? There is in such an attitude some of the ungraciousness of a guest who, accustomed to being entertained with formality, complains because, taking his host unawares, he is expected to take pot luck.

In a sense, *Above the Circus* is pot luck. It is the remainder of that literary exuberance which, after writing *Rogue Herries*, one would expect to have been drained out of a man's system, leaving him stone-dry. It contains an idea which Mr. Walpole considered, quite rightly, was too good to waste, and which might have spoiled by keeping. For although there are certain ideas, certain plots that mellow in proportion to the self-restraint exercised by the writer in setting them down, there are others which lose their brightness and savour and go flat as a glass of wine unless the right moment is seized for their degustation.

It contains an excellent plot, an interesting underplot, both of which are drawn to satisfactory conclusion; strong characterisation, and highly individual treatment of scene and situation.

Yes, say the disgruntled ones; and we expect all this, and something more, from Hugh Walpole.

The present writer begs leave to suggest that the something more is there: that the something more colours the whole book, and redeems it from that dull limbo to which—in the opinion of its critics—it is condemned. That something more is the ultra-mundanism, the midnight mood in which it seems to have been conceived and written: a midnight, not of churchyards yawning and graves giving up their dead, which is the favourite midnight of the novelist, but of lost contacts, of defenceless drifting at the mercy of a dream. The whole thing is coloured by the point of view of a hungry, then derelict man. Flesh and bone wear thin, there are moments when all the characters seem to have cast off their earthly teguments, and stand shivering in space, with nothing between themselves and themselves. In the chapter called "Shadow Pursuing" occurs such a moment, when Father Christmas becomes a stranger to Dick Gunn. And in between such moments there are patches of extraordinarily vivid writing, scraps of conversation, patches of seemingly irrelevant description, like the bright rings of colour children see by pressing their fingers against their eyes and then staring into the dark. In such passages I find a spontaneity, an ardour partly derivative from Herries and partly from the mood in which *Maradick* was written. The book has a quality of youthfulness; but no longer the youthfulness of 1910, but a post-war youthfulness, melancholy and apprehensive, which seems to put *Above the Dark Circus* in a niche of its own, outside the standard of criticism brought to the majority of Mr. Walpole's novels.

I do not claim for *Above the Dark Circus* an equal alignment with *The Cathedral*, *Hans Frost*, or other of the major works of Hugh Walpole; but to those who would deny its significance I would maintain that it is as much a child of Mr. Walpole's genius, by his mistress, Romance, as its forerunners, *Maradick at Forty* and *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair*, with whom it is linked by its shameless acknowledgment of the power of the Unseen.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE RUSSIAN NOVELS

IN *Affirmations*, a series of little books published at a shilling by Benn, and purporting to be the summaries of their writers' creeds, Hugh Walpole, in his essay on *My Religious Experience*, sets down the following incident:

“ It was during the Russian retreat of 1915, and my regiment had halted in a small Galician town and we were passing the night in the ruined château of a Galician nobleman. I remember lying on the dusty boards and looking up at the painted ceiling with the naked gods and goddesses, the pink Cupids and the marble fountains; the place was in a terrible mess, broken furniture lay everywhere, and there was a huge organ half-tumbling to the floor. It was terribly hot, I remember, most of us lay there nearly naked with the sweat pouring from our bodies. Suddenly I was quite certain that in another half-hour I should be dead. I had often, of course, before in the past years expected death at any moment, but this was an experience quite different from the others; it was as if someone had told me that I was going to die, as a doctor sometimes tells his patient. I knew exactly the manner of my death; the Austrians would blow up a bridge near us and we should be blown up with it. I knew exactly how it would be, because I have had all my life nightmares, dreams in which I have experienced exactly the sense of sudden death; there would be a terrific noise, a blow in the chest, a momentary agony of suspense, and then nothing more. On this occasion I was quite certain, and I remember thinking of things and

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people that I was going to leave; I remember feeling sorry that I hadn't written a masterpiece, that I must leave two people whom I dearly loved, but most of all that I must abandon so many beautiful things, tiny things, the sound of running water, birch trees in the sun, a hot day by the sea, music, reading a good book by the fire, a walk over the hills, and so on. Then, with absolute conviction, I was aware that I would be leaving nothing, that whatever I had found lovely and of good report I should still enjoy, that, as Blake said, death was no more than a passing from one room to another. The climax of this little incident was disappointing; a bridge *was* blown up, but not the bridge near us, and I lived to fight another day."¹

Later, in a following paragraph, he goes on to say that this night in the Galician castle altered the tenor of his life: "a new strand has been worked into the pattern of my carpet, and that remarkably against my will."

The "new strand" comes up clearly in the weaving of the two war-time novels, which stand out in the vast "family" collection of the Walpole books as a rather strange, delicate foreign half-brother and -sister might stand out in a large and strongly characterised family of boys and girls. The family likeness is there; one catches a profile, an attitude or a gesture which dispels all doubt of relationship; but in all else these two are aliens, bound together by their dissimilarity to the rest.

How typical of Hugh Walpole are these lines printed on the title-page:

"But the fools, because they cared more deeply, were chosen. . . ." *Spanish Nights* (HENRY GALLEON).

Had he wished deliberately to fling the veil of the romantic over this novel (*The Dark Forest*) he could hardly have done better than by prefacing it with this fictitious quotation from a fictitious author. There *is* no *Spanish Nights*; there *is* no Henry Galleon—cries cold reason. But stay: has not Hugh Walpole's

¹ *Affirmations: My Religious Experience.*

belief in his own creation conquered our incredulity? Is not Henry Galleon as real to us as he was to Peter Westcott, as he is to Hugh Walpole? Later on I shall have a word or two to say about this pseudo-realism, as for want of a better name I must call it; for the present, we must accept the Walpole-Galleon prelude, we must accept John Trenchard, and we must accept the fact that Hugh Walpole has chosen to write about the war in the romantic tradition.

There will be many, of the realist persuasion, who will lose their tempers at the above statement; who will inquire, with varying degrees of profanity, how war can be written about romantically. War, to them, is the supreme realism, the triumph of matter over mind. What sort of a sampler pattern does this Walpole pretend to make of it?

Simply this: that instead of thrusting us down into the mud and blood, he holds us secure in the temple of the mind; instead of leaving us earthbound, he frees us from our fleshly limitation and carries us up, out, above the whole thing, to some plane from which we can see it all, and, surely, are better placed to judge than if we were down there, where the writers of *All Quiet on the Western Front*, *Company K* and other war-writers would leave us. He gives us the war in perspective, instead of in *facia*: not coloured with Gibbrian sentimentality or Remarquescue pessimism. He shows us unmistakably that through the whole tragedy of the war Mansoul was strong, swift, vital as in the days of peace: stronger and swifter, more vital, because the demands made upon it were greater, and called for these qualities in a greater degree; and invincible in the end. An idealist's point of view, but we are less likely, in this age of romantic revival, to look upon the idealist's viewpoint as folly than we were ten or twelve years ago. It is the spiritual struggle which he shows us, rather than the material one; it is the war behind the war.

I have already said that in writing these two novels of Russian life Hugh Walpole does not for a moment capture the Russian atmosphere; he does not pretend to do so; anticipating criticism on this score, he very shrewdly disarms his critics by stating, in

the first chapter of *The Secret City* and on the very first page, that the Russia which he gives us is Russia seen through English eyes. His mixture of English among Russian characters is wise and deliberate, and justifies the mentality of the two books, which is not a Russian mentality at all. But he gives us something more than English-Russia: he gives us the effect of Russia, from a psychological and a practical standpoint, on an English temperament.

In one respect, and one only, the books have the Russian quality: that is the quality of contemplation, of speculation inherent in the Russian nature.

In *The Dark Forest*, as in *The Secret City*, the idea of Life is interchangeable with the idea of Death. The one balances the other. The act of dying has little importance in itself. It gathers its fictitious importance only from the material horror with which, in so many cases, it is surrounded. It is really only a pause in the eternity cycle. The barrier between Life and Death is a fictitious barrier which dissolves the moment that the searchlight of mature reasoning is turned upon it. This thought is borne in upon one as one reads, without any particular reference to religion, but rather through a process of simple common sense—too simple to be called logic; as though someone said "It is autumn," and the brown and gold of October woods were immediately registered in the brain.

This is the type of thought which the label-loving English mind likes to call fatalism; an unsatisfactory designation, because it implies an effortless submission, a relinquishment of will, and an indolent acceptance of "what the gods send." Nothing could be farther from the Russian mentality than this spineless attitude to the riddle of Life and Death. A keen speculative interest in that which lies beyond Death, the will to understand it if possible, and, if not, to accept its mysteries without cavil or objection, runs through the two books. Life is uncertainty, Death is certainty; therefore it behoves one to find out what one can about that *athanasia* or whatever it may be that succeeds the act of dying, and in which all problems are solved.

Both novels are written in the subjective manner: which is not simply to say that they are written in Mr. Walpole's seldom-employed first person singular, but that the spiritual matter in them overwhelms the material. The shots on the Nevsky Prospekt and the dead man lying in the snow are trivialities beside the dark thoughts pullulating in the mind of Markovitch; the death of Maria Ivanovna is merely incidental to Semyonov's mutter in the dying Trenchard's ear: "You've won, Mr. . . . You've won!"

The story of *The Dark Forest* is the story of a woman loved by three men: by Trenchard, the gentle, ineffectual idealist, by Semyonov, the practical sensualist, and by Durward, the "I," the relater of the episode. It is played out against the background of the Carpathians, and in the Dark Forest.

" 'This is a strange forest,' I said. 'Although there are trees there's no shade. It burns like a furnace.' " ¹

It covers exactly the ground that the author covered in his war service, and, in this sense, is autobiographical. Its action follows the retreat of the Russian army, its drama derives from the underplay of emotion that focuses about the figure of Marie Ivanovna, and reaches its climax in her death. Thus, baldly, the plot might be transcribed; but the book's chief interest lies in the mental travail of its characters, and in the questions, always on the edge of solution, which are never quite formed or answered.

" 'This Death, you know . . . it simply doesn't exist. It can't stop *her*. It can't stop anyone if they're determined. I'll find her and before Semyonov does, too.' " ²

Each of the characters, caught in the spinning uncertainty of life, its seeming lack of plan, its fearful lack of cohesiveness so plain to Trenchard, is in search of the permanent. Each seeks it in his own way—Trenchard, Semyonov, the doctor Nikitin

¹ *The Dark Forest*. ² Ibid.

and the little Andrey Vasseilivitch. Maria Ivanovna joins in the search, but her purpose lacks the strength of the men's. She is feminine, defective, her interest in the Now is stronger than her interest in the To Be. Her betrayal of Trenchard with Semyonov we know from the beginning to be inevitable. She is a sensationalist, while John lives in his world of ideals, more occupied in fighting the impractical side of his nature than in making love to Maria Ivanovna the way she desires.

“ ‘ I want to be—to be at my best here. Practical, you know—like the others. I don't want her to think me——’ ”¹

Yet even Maria Ivanovna finds that which she is seeking, though intermittently—through terror and through love. She who has always dreaded Fear loses her dread in her love for Semyonov, who gives her the confidence which the gentle Trenchard cannot inspire.

Maria Ivanovna is one of the most credible of Hugh Walpole's heroines—credible in the sense that she inspires the love of two widely different people; it is Semyonov, who treats her without ceremony, who makes us believe in her, as Trenchard, seeing her through the mists of his own idealism, hardly succeeds in doing.

“ ‘ Now, for the first time ’ (she says) ‘ I care for someone more than myself, and suddenly I am afraid of death no longer. It is true, Ivan Andreievitch, I do not believe that death can separate Alexei from me; I have more reason to wish to live than I have ever had, but now I am not afraid. Wherever I am, Alexei will come—wherever he is I will go. . . . ’ ”²

And yet it is Trenchard, the Chosen Fool, who reaches her first in the end!

Each of them finds in Death, instead of the Agent of Separation, the One who draws together; who with so strange a

¹ *The Dark Forest.* ² *Ibid.*

justice gives to the weak what they need: Maria to Trenchard, an Alexandra to Andrey.

These characters of an abnormal simplicity—these Little Children—are a favourite creation of Hugh Walpole's; he chooses them for their close connection with God, with his Leading Character, who is familiar to them as He is not to ordinary men and women, whose worldly knowledge sets them a little apart from Him. Of such are Klimov, in *Hans Frost*; of such Stephen in *Fortitude*, Punch in *Maradick* and Looney One-Two-Three in *Harmer John*.

Simplicity we know as the key-note of the Russian nature; it is the quality which renders the Russian so baffling to the average English person; it is a quality which Hugh Walpole happens to be peculiarly equipped to understand. There is in him much of the same simplicity, although in him it is translated into the English idiom. In Andrey Vasseilivitch he presents us with the very essence of Little Russia, all its nobility, its childlike acceptance of pain, its utterly unconscious heroism, its humility, its need to worship, and its devotion to the object of its worship. The two chapters in which, respectively, Nikitin and Andrey tell the story, from their own angles, of the former's love for Alexandra Pavlovna, the wife of Andrey, are the finest in the two books. There is something lofty in the writing that sets them apart from all the rest; for a moment the writer does actually succeed in doing the thing he disclaims—he "sees Russian."

How tender, how lovely is the character of Alexandra Pavlovna, seen thus obliquely, through the eyes of her lovers. How noble is their relationship, how pure their understanding—compared with the state of things between Maria Ivanovna (who is hardly Russian at all, but, one feels, made to a Russian recipe from good English materials) and the men who love her.

It is singular that in these two novels Hugh Walpole gives us portraits of women whom we can accept almost unquestioningly in every particular, as women and as heroines. I think this has something to do with environment; it may be that the soul of

Glebeshire is no more propitious for the rearing of heroines than the soil of Portland Place or of Polchester! Young ladies "raised" amid such surroundings may feel obliged to carry with them an air of convention, of gloves and handbags and little card-cases and the minutiae of society, which no doubt are more difficult to manipulate heroically than a samovar in a Petrograd flat. Why this should be so is difficult to explain; the samovar is no more to Vera Michailovna than the tea-pot is to Katherine Trenchard, and one can recall one scene at least from a diversion of Sir Nigel Playfair's that made very merry with the simplicities of Russian *ménage*. So environment cannot carry all the blame for the heaviness of Mr. Walpole's Young Ladies. One cannot help feeling that it is something to do with perspective—geographical, this time: as though the removal of his Russian women from the geographical foreground, placing them at a nice distance, as it were, where he is in no danger of being embarrassed by encountering them at tea-parties, has emboldened him to write of them with a greater freedom than he feels at liberty to employ upon his English heroines.

Whatever may be the cause of it, his Russian women fulfil in a degree that his English women do not the heroic requirement. Without dominating, they pervade the books in which they appear; one has an after-death consciousness of Maria Ivanovna; she lives in the men who loved her, as Alexandra Pavlovna lives in the curious attachment of Andrey Vasseilitch to Nikitin.

It is not likely that either of these Russian novels should make a strong popular appeal to Hugh Walpole's English public. Those who care for them will be the contemplative souls, to whom a philosophy is of more importance than a story. There will be many who will actively dislike them, because in them he gives free rein to a most un-English impulse, which is the exteriorising of oneself, the discussion of religious experience, than which the average English person will more readily discuss his digestive system.

Here one might note that no English novelist up to the present

day has written with such a lack of self-consciousness, so complete an absence of priggishness, of the spiritual life. In this he is, again, almost completely Russian. To the Russian there is nothing indecent in the discussion of every sort of intellectual and spiritual experience under the sun. In Dostoievsky, in Tolstoi, one finds this characteristic of the nation, this limpidity of thought, this mysticism, which one can trace—in its English idiom—throughout the majority of Hugh Walpole's novels.

In *The Secret City* he gives to the foregoing book a sequel which is greater than itself.

He speaks in *The Crystal Box* of "those groups gathered like flies round lumps of sugar, talking, talking, talking up and down the Nevsky Prospekt." *The Secret City* teems with such conversations; it is the very essence of the *Why?* that possessed every class of Russian during those years immediately preceding, during, and after the War. The characters of *The Secret City* are the Super-Seekers of that long file of spiritual pilgrims which begins with Olva Dune and ends with Rogue Herries.

Its connection with *The Dark Forest* lies in the return of Alexei Petrovitch Semyonov, the man in love with a ghost, and in the identification of the story-teller with that same Durward who led us through the Forest itself.

Here again, in Vera Michailovna, we have the woman who gathers the love of three men towards herself—her husband, and the two Englishmen, Lawrence (of *Prelude to Adventure*), and Bohun.

"Life is a tragedy to every Russian simply because the daily round is forgotten by him in the pursuit of an ultimate meaning."¹

The writer of that sentence stumbled on a supreme truth. Here we have the three Englishmen caught into the tragic pursuit, lost, baffled, doomed to failure; drowned in the flood of Russian subtlety, which is only a degree less formidable than Russian simplicity.

¹ *The Secret City*.

The atmosphere of the book is one of unrest, of seen and unseen danger. There is the revolution gathering slowly in the background, there is Lawrence's love for Vera, there is the return of Semyonov, the ghost-haunted, the obsessed. The danger point shifts: now it is Markovitch, the husband of Vera, the gentle, irritable, sentimental failure to whom the arms of her pity are open, while she gives the arms of her passion to Lawrence; now it is Lawrence himself; now it is Semyonov—the red light flickers from one to another, and wherever it travels there is always that same tension of nerves, the same apprehension of the thing that never happens, the same preposterous awareness of something threatening, something to be feared. And when conflagration seems imminent it is damped down by the inevitable flood of discussion, that postpones to infinity everything save the tormenting *Why?*

The slow and ghastly progress of Semyonov's spiritual attack upon Markovitch is almost incredible to the English mind. His character is the great connective link of the two books; he is a kind of Russian Rogue Herries, compact equally of fineness and ignobility, of sensuality and spirituality, of idealism and cynicism. The tragedy of Semyonov's life was his meeting with Maria Ivanovna in the Dark Forest; this was his *real* tragedy, although superficially her death was the thing that ruined him and caused him to ruin others.

What was he when he met her? A disillusioned idealist, engaged in making a paying game of his disillusion. He had got life harnessed to his desires. He knew the price of things, and called the tune on those who did not. And he met Maria Ivanovna, and she shattered him: because she roused in him an appetite sharper and stranger than any he had previously known, and before he could satisfy it—she was gone.

The man who comes back in *The Secret City* is a madman, in the sense that everything in him is directed towards one idea: towards death, and the after-death, and the problem of finding his lost love beyond death. He is driven insane by the thought that Trenchard, whom he supplanted, has gone before him:

that somewhere beyond the curtain he and Maria Ivanovna are sitting together in sunshine, laughing at him.

Suicide is the obvious solution; but it is just too obvious for a Russian of Semyonov's calibre. His pride is second only to his love, and to kill himself is to kill his pride, to go in to Maria Ivanovna maimed and weakened, lacking half his manhood. He is a king, too proud to go to Death; Death must be brought to him.

Not easy; Death also is a king. So slowly, deviously Semyonov proceeds to hatch the plot that is to bring him his desire. For a plot one must have a victim, and Semyonov's victim is to hand—pathetically to hand.

“Suppose he were to select someone, some weak and irritable and sentimental and disappointed man, someone whose every foible and weakness he knew, suppose he were to place himself near him and so irritate and confuse and madden him that at last one day, in a fury of rage and despair, that man were to do for him what he is too proud to do for himself?”¹

The victim, of course, is Markovitch, his niece's husband. How he settles down upon their household like a bird of prey, how he watches the progress of Lawrence's love for Vera, how he tortures Markovitch, first commending and then sneering at his inventions, playing upon his sensitiveness, destroying his beliefs—all the time less like a human being than like a tormented devil—until he accomplishes his object is the theme of the second novel, which I look upon as one of the noblest, if not the noblest, of Hugh Walpole's pre-Herries books.

¹ *The Secret City*.

CHAPTER SIX

POLCHESTER

IN the year 1913, Hugh Walpole wrote a book called *Fortitude*, and in this book definitely transcended all early promise. The wild, puppyish mood of Maradick was past and gone; a certain amount of youthful gall had been worked out of the system in *Mr. Perrin and Mr. Traill*.

There are certain things that the novelist who aspires to success must outgrow, certain ardours he must learn to curb, certain restraints and decencies which he must practise, and, above all, certain public prejudices that he must, outwardly, at least, respect. He has to learn that there are certain matters with which the general public simply will not be bothered; he has to make the discovery that the public mind is essentially indolent. He has to make the great decision between pandering to this indolence, and so becoming popular, or defeating it so cunningly that it is unconscious of defeat, and so becoming eminent. Or, maybe, he will choose to join those eclectic ranks indicated by Mrs. Leavis, in her curiously limited and snobbish monograph on the English novel: in which case he will be neither popular nor eminent, but a few ladies and gentlemen will claim him as their own particular property, and by their airs of proprietorship will alienate from him many who would willingly have joined the ranks of his admirers.

He has, in fact, to learn an infinite patience with the great, sleepy, sulky, easily-flattered, easily-offended arbiter of his fate, if he aspires to success in his art; and, by success, I do not mean that *succès d'estime* so dear to the artist, so expensive to his pocket, but the success that brings means to beautify life, to enrich the temple of the mind.

For this is the true meaning of success, of which the royalty statement, the publishers' advertisements, the adulation of the critics are merely the symbols. To the artist Art is a mistress, insatiable as the daughter of the horse-leech. She is not content with the brains, body and blood of a man, she requires other more material offerings. Having infected her lover with a fearful contagion, the fever for beauty, she is not satisfied until he has brought beauty to her and heaped it in a mountain at her feet. And success is the power to make this libation to one's art, to surround beauty with beauty. Nemesis awaits the artist who does not realise this thing, no pity is profound enough for the one who fails to achieve it. Such a one is he who, through pig-headedness, vanity, or sheer lack of knowledge of mass psychology, has failed to placate the element he desires to conquer. There can be no highwaymanry on the road to success; it is worse than useless to hold a blunderbuss to the temple of the public and say—"Your approbation or your life!" At such treatment your public will, quite simply, die on you. Nor can patronage achieve for you the great thing, although it can help—if you deliver the goods that are to be patronised.

Far be it from the writer to preach a slavish deference to public opinion: but the fact remains that while human nature lasts, a message will gain or lose authority according to the form in which it is delivered: that if one feels one's message to be of importance, there is nothing to gain by clothing it in a formula intelligible only to a minority of one's listeners. And that, just as one is slow to accept the authority of a message delivered by a child, so the world is slow to accept the message of an artist who approaches his public without a certain formality, a certain conviction of authority behind him.

England is, notoriously, the most difficult country on which to make an artistic impression. The English are not sufficiently emotional to be easily swayed by art. The artist's path, in England, is the path of propitiation, his is still the backstairs entrance, he is still at the mercy of the ignorant, the vulgar, the moneyed majority; and it is good for art that it should be so.

For in no country do the charlatan, the pretender, the dabbler and the dilettante find it more difficult to obtain a footing ; not, indeed, because the public is aware of the difference between charlatanry and art, but because it is genuinely and sleepily indifferent to art in general, and only arouses itself to join in applause or execration at the bidding of one of those arbiters of public opinion whom it keeps solely for the purpose of relieving itself of the arduous duty of making up its own mind.

Thus the English artist is disciplined from the beginning in that humility most conducive to the development of art; he is never allowed to forget his national unimportance. There is no English legislation which concerns itself with the lives of painters or writers—if we except a censorship which exists mainly for the purpose of quelling any rebellious tendencies, any inclination on the part of either to indulge in that dangerous sincerity so prejudicial to the British constitution!

But if we in England are slow and cautious in recognising our artists, our loyalty atones for our tardiness. Our loyalty is, indeed, rather absurd; a reputation, once gained, is difficult to lose, in England; and so it is difficult for the artist, once established, not to sink into uxoriousness. There are many English artists—notably Rudyard Kipling—who have not advanced one iota from the hour of their initial success. No pressure is put upon them to do so: nowhere do we see this more clearly than in the theatre, where, once an artist has made a success in a particular role, it is tacitly assumed that all subsequent roles shall repeat the pattern of the first. The conservatism of the British nature is the mandragora of British art. Hugh Walpole is an outstanding example of an artist who has gone from strength to strength, and who, after writing twenty-four novels, achieves the pinnacle of his success, at the age of fifty, in the last volume of the Herries saga. There are few among the young modern writers for whom one would venture to predict such a career, and too many who, meeting with premature recognition, have allowed self-satisfaction or lack of purpose to sweep them out of the current which carries on-

ward to permanent establishment in the history of the nation's literature.

And even Hugh Walpole, whose art has never for a moment stood still, who has never succumbed to the *Hush-a-bye baby* of the tree-top dweller, has done nothing to contribute new form to the English novel. His energies have been directed to the perfection of his original and classic style; he has been content to accept the Trollopian formula, to burnish and sharpen it. He has left experiment to the gods and goddesses of Mrs. Leavis's idolatry: to James Joyce, Aldous Huxley, T. W. Powys, D. H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf—to men and women as spiritually cosmopolitan in their outlook as he is spiritually British: with the result that while their readers are numbered in their hundreds his are numbered in their thousands.

Probably one of the strongest factors in Hugh Walpole's early success was the absence of that artistic pugnacity aforementioned, with which so many promising young writers have cheated their own ends. He was, as we have seen, passionately anxious to be liked: a dangerous quality, for it might so easily lead, in the majority of writers, to insincerity. Luckily for Hugh Walpole, his own likes, his own opinions, his own beliefs were exactly to the taste of the people he desired to please. Quite honestly and simply he believed in God, in the home, in the power of Good over Evil, and in the fundamental decency of mankind. On these, with the full approval of the public, he took his stand, and they in return, kindly overlooked his romanticism. He did not bully Fortune, he wooed her with all the charm he brought to bear—less satisfactorily—on “Elizabeth,” in Pomerania. From his friends in London he had acquired a few sophistications, which he wore, not ostentatiously, but like a neat buttonhole. For the main part, he retained his naïveté—a quality peculiarly appealing to his English readers. He totally eschewed cynicism, which is the bane of the British public, and when, with the declaration of his artistic creed, in *Fortitude*, Fortune fell at last into his arms, it is inconceivable that he did not beam with the triumph of the successful wooer.

My reason for speaking for *Fortitude* in this chapter dedicated to the Polchester novels is that in *The Cathedral* Hugh Walpole achieved, some nine years later, an almost identical success—a success which embraced the approval of the unliterary as well as the literary classes, which united in their appreciation of *The Cathedral* as completely as they had split over such novels as *The Prelude to Adventure*, *the Dark Forest* and *The Secret City*.

There is, however, no question of comparison between the two books. Nine years, in the case of such a writer as Hugh Walpole, cover ground from which it is necessary to shade the eyes to look back at the valley one has left behind. *Fortitude* is crowded, diffuse, full of repetitions, careless, and contains sufficient material for two books; *The Cathedral* is grave, cool, spacious and shapely as the building from which it takes its title. One has no mental lumber to clear out of the brain in considering *The Cathedral*: there is no character, no incident which cheats the memory. A growing lucidity is, in fact, characteristic of Mr. Walpole's work from *The Green Mirror* onwards, and reaches its apotheosis in this majestic novel.

It may, I think, be called a comedy of self-delusions, of which Archdeacon Brandon's delusion that he is a great man is the greatest. The delicate malice of the author's incident with the elephant is sufficient to prevent the reader's being deluded on this score. Brandon's pride, which has stood secure against the disgrace of his son's being sent down from Oxford, collapses before the loss of his hat. The implication of this seemingly trivial incident is dealt with by Mrs. Combermere:

“‘The point is’ (says Miss Stiles) ‘that an elephant straight from the desert ate our best Archdeacon’s best hat in the High Street. You must admit that that’s a laughable circumstance in this the sixtieth year of our Good Queen’s reign. I, for one, intend to laugh.’

“‘Oh, no, you don’t, Ellen,’ and, to everyone’s surprise, Mrs. Combermere’s voice was serious. ‘I mean what I say. I’m not joking at all. Brandon may have his faults, but this

town and everything decent in it hangs by him. Take him away and the place drops to pieces.' ”¹

With a little shudder of apprehension, the reader is led to ponder on how thin, how frail a thread stands between Polchester and its destruction!

Not that Archdeacon Brandon is thin or frail from a physical viewpoint. He is presented to us as an episcopal Apollo, the uncrowned King of Polchester; yet from the beginning it is obvious that he is no king, but a slave: the slave of a lamp, not of the Holy Spirit, but of the Cathedral; a man who believes himself to be a free agent, and is yet a captive.

The pride of the Cathedral and the pride of Archdeacon Brandon are one; together they form an impregnable barrier between God and the people of Polchester. They are afraid and jealous lest any should cheat them of their dues by some uncere- monious approach to the Almighty; hastily and apprehensively they pile up the bastionades in protection of their own preserves, for, like fraudulent stewards, they are afraid lest some man should simply walk in and take God by the hand. They realise that if such a thing should happen their vocations would be gone; if once their superfluity were recognised they would be swept away with the dust and cobwebs among the cathedral groins. And therefore they play upon the credulity and ignorance of the people, bolstering up each other's dignity—and much discom- posed by the vagaries of an elephant which did not realise—how should it?—that the person of Archdeacon Brandon was sacred, and identified with God. Had it been a Polchester-reared elephant, no doubt it would have known better; but this poor, benighted animal belonged to a travelling circus, and had no sense of sacrilege.

In Archdeacon Brandon Hugh Walpole draws for us an impressive figurehead of a not unfamiliar pattern; most of us have encountered these dignitaries of a church whose first gospel was humility: proud, pompous, arrogant men, perpetually on their knees before the image of themselves, which they worship under pretext of worshipping God. The history of *The*

¹ *The Cathedral.*

Cathedral is the history of pride's overthrow, the pricking of the vast, smoky bubble which is Archdeacon Brandon: but the power of the Cathedral persists, is unshaken. Everyone acknowledges it—even the drunken artist, Davray, who beholds in it the thing which it is intended to be, the antechamber to the house of God.

“ I would let its meanest stone crush the life out of my body and be glad. At least I know its power, its power. I adore it! I adore it! ”¹

The public mind, which, out of shams and hypocrisies has created alike the Cathedral and Archdeacon Brandon, is strong enough to destroy the latter; it is powerless against the former, which, like a Frankenstein monster, has destroyed its creators. When Harmer John brought his bright evangel to Polchester, ten years later, it was the Cathedral that defeated him, the Cathedral which closed its doors against newer and purer creeds.

The tragedy of Archdeacon Brandon plays itself out against a typically Trollopian background of clergy, of industrious parish ladies, of townsfolk, their petty intrigues and peering curiosities. This is the miniature kingdom over which, at the beginning of the book, Brandon reigns, with complete assurance—until an elephant knocks off his hat.

The arrival of Canon Ronder sounds the first note of warning: Canon Ronder, so mild, so agreeable, so sleek, so anxious to render himself tactfully *au fait* with cathedral politics; selfish and pleasant—and gently amused by the pretensions of the Archdeacon. Here is a character so cushioned in its own satisfactions that the impact of Brandon's personality is powerless to leave an impression. The incident of the elephant derives its major importance from the presence of Ronder, who is one—the most important one—of the witnesses to the Archdeacon at disadvantage; and it is quite positive that, although the rest of the audience will see the elephant as elephant, no more, and, in time, laugh the matter into thin air, Ronder will recognise the

¹ *The Cathedral.*

implications of the situation, and lay the incident carefully in that orderly, well-docketed mind of his, for future reference.

It is easily to be imagined that the arrival of Ronder in so closely knit a community as that of Polchester will speedily influence the trend of popular opinion. The tradition of Archdeacon Brandon has, like the majority of traditions, begun to be a little tiresome. Individuals whose toes have suffered in the past from the Archdeaconal chariot wheels, and who have been constrained by the Traditions to smirk over their injuries, gather courage, at least, to whisper their resentments. It is less that they are stirred to active rebellion by Canon Ronder, than that the mere presence of Ronder in their midst, calmly and agreeably refusing to be impressed by that which they have been educated to consider impressive, encourages them to form independent opinion; and this is the easier in that Brandon himself has produced an unexpected vulnerability in the person of his son, Falk, who has got himself involved with a girl of the town.

The Archdeacon's attitude to his son's love affair—which is the logical one for a man in his position—inflames a section of the townsfolk against him, and, infinitely worse from Brandon's point of view, exposes him to the pity of his own class. And when he turns, for reassurance, to the affairs of the Chapter, where his supremacy has always been recognised:

“The Archdeacon was a little late, as, I am afraid, he liked to be when he was sure that others would be punctual.”¹

he is defeated by Ronder in the absurd issue of the garden roller. An elephant and a garden roller! Surely fate was unnecessarily unkind in choosing such foolish instruments for the undoing of an Archdeacon.

His tottering self-assurance receives another blow in the discovery that he has lost his authority over his wife. When Mrs. Brandon refuses to get up to go to Early Celebration, his perturbation is less on account of Mrs. Brandon's soul, but for her defiance of himself, and even in this crisis, like an ostrich with its

¹ *The Cathedral.*

head in the sand, he comforts himself with the thought that she must be ill; very inconvenient, of course, but how much less inconvenient than if he were to admit that this faint self-assertion was, in actual fact, an act of rebellion!

He has to accept it in the end, and worse: the publication of poor Mrs. Brandon's invertebrate affair with Morris, and, last of all, her elopement. He has to sit lonely in his study, and know that, save for his daughter Joan, the world has deserted him. He has to take his troubles to the Bishop, only to be told:

“ ‘ My dear friend, you are not alone in this. We have all been tried like this—tested——’ ”¹

and, face to face with utter understanding, his bleeding egotism has to cry out:

“ ‘ Tested! . . . Why should I be tested? What have I done in all my life that is not acceptable to God? What sin have I committed? What disloyalty have I shown? ’ ”²

He has to come home, to learn the truth from his wife:

“ ‘ I hate you. I’ve hated you for years.’

“ ‘ Why? ’ His hand closed on her shoulder.

“ ‘ Because of your conceit and your pride. Because you’ve never thought of me. Because I’ve always been a piece of furniture to you—less than that. Because you’ve been so pleased with yourself and self-satisfied and stupid. Yes. Yes. Most because you’re so stupid. So stupid. Never seeing anything, never knowing anything and always—so satisfied. And when the town was pleased with you and said you were so fine I’ve laughed, knowing what you were, and I thought to myself, “ There’ll come a time when they’ll find him out ”—and now they have. They know what you are at last. And I’m glad! I’m glad! I’m glad! ’ ”³

He has to face that last expression of mass hatred on the fair-ground, before inviting his last defeat at the hands of the Cathedral itself. It remains for this grim enemy to turn upon its

¹ *The Cathedral.*

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

loyal servant in the end; the words "*Et tu, Brute!*" must rise to our minds, as Cæsar falls, stabbed through the heart by the one he deemed his greatest friend. For the Cathedral is a monster without pity, without gratitude. It is the projection of the minds of its creators, and perhaps it resented Brandon, because he had stolen some of the dignity which it guarded for itself.

The thread of a clerical intrigue meanders through the story, involving the appointment of a clergyman whose cause is espoused by those sick of the old Brandonian autocracy, and aware of the necessity for the infusion of new blood into the moribund body of the Cathedral clergy. Needless to say, Canon Ronder is sponsor to the proposal of the Reverend Ambrose Wistons, against whom the few nervous Brandonites, apprehensive of the volcanic effect of Mr. Wistons's unorthodox views, oppose their own candidate, the Rev. Rex Forsyth.

To do Brandon justice, his opposition of Wistons is founded, not upon personal issue, but on his own conviction that the doctrines of Wistons are the doctrines of atheism. This is Brandon's interpretation of the modernist religion, and the personal element enters only in his rage that his own judgment, for so long unquestioned, should, in this vital instance, be challenged by the Chapter. There is a moment at the end when Brandon does indeed touch purity and singleness of heart: in his last, passionate appeal after the results of the voting: when it has been discovered that one vote—his own—has been recorded for Forsyth, the rest for Wistons.

"No. . . . No. . . . Stop one minute. You must. You—all of you.

"Mr. Dean—all of you. . . . Oh, God, help me now! . . . You have been influenced by your feelings about myself. Forget me, turn me away, send me from the town, anything, anything . . . I beseech you to think only of the good of the Cathedral in this affair. If you admit this man it is the beginning of the end. Slowly it will all be undermined. Belief in Christ, belief in God Himself. . . . Think of the

future and your responsibility to the unborn children when they come to you and say: "Where is our faith? Why did you take it from us? Give it back to us!" Oh, stop for a moment! Postpone this for only a little while. Don't do this thing!"¹

In this stark moment the soul of Brandon burns its way through personal vanity, arrogance, jealousy and selfishness: the charred ash flutters to the earth: Brandon, simple, naked, has become a man seeking God, seeking Him beyond the Cathedral which has limited his vision for so long.

" 'God is love, though. . . . You betray Him again and again, but He comes back.' "²

In his last extremity Brandon finds God—not the God of the Cathedral, the grim, Messianic Deity, but God the ultimate refuge.

" 'This . . . Death,' he whispered. Then, looking up again at Foster, 'My heart. That fails me, too.'

"And, bowing his head, he died."³

In *Maradick at Forty*, in *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair* and in *Above the Dark Circus* Hugh Walpole presented us, as we have seen, with three types of cruelty: here we have a fourth type—the cruelty of the mass mind; the cruelty of animals which, seeing one of their number down, rush in to contribute their share in his destruction. In proportion as the mob hatred accumulates, so must the heart of the reader melt in pity for Brandon, who is, in a very special sense, the victim of his own stupidity.

There can be no question that *The Cathedral* is one of Hugh Walpole's major achievements. It is one of the two or three novels not to be overshadowed even by the Herries books, and almost inevitably destined to become a classic. There is a severity in his style and an economy in its form of expression which mark a new era in his writing. A window has been

¹ *The Cathedral*.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

thrown open, and a heap of superfluities blown away on a high wind. The first of his post-war novels was *The Captives*, in which the change is already apparent, but which is a much lesser book than *The Cathedral*—a book of little people and commonplace motives, a return to sanity after the nightmare of *The Secret City*: a comfortable book, that poses no problem and evokes no shattering emotion.

The War exhausted, temporarily, our capacity for emotionalism, and it is typical of Hugh Walpole's instinctive reaction to public taste that he should produce such a book as *The Captives* at a time when every man (himself included) needed a sedative rather than a stimulant. *The Captives* is, in substance, the reiteration of his original beliefs, the reintroduction of characters which the War had relegated to the background, their reinstatement in their proper relation to the law of life, which is a law of sanity, of decency, and of obligation to one's creeds. But even in this, in a sense, retrogressive novel, there is a new element: or rather, there is an absence of elements which, in the earlier work of Hugh Walpole, we have found dispensable: a certain diffuseness, which has now become selective, a dangerous disposition to sentimentality, which has changed to sincerity, a too prolonged Peter-Pannishness, which met its end, presumably, in the Carpathians in 1914. The writer who gives us *The Captives* and its subsequent novels is a man who has reached man's stature, intellectually and artistically. *The Captives*, though long, is never diffuse: *The Young Enchanted*, though romantic, is never sentimental; and in *The Cathedral* Hugh Walpole presents to us the sum total of all his literary experience, following it, after the parenthesis of *Jeremy and Hamlet* (which is Polchester from another angle), with the book which I admit to be my own favourite of all apart from the Herries novels.

I have already mentioned that the emotional focus of *The Old Ladies* lies in May Beringer's piece of red amber.

“ Ruby and crimson and amber, blood red and honey gold,
threaded with flame and clouded with smoky bronze, the

pedestal and the dragon came towards her. From that instant of their mutual greeting they were one."

The book is like that: it has the grace, the glory, the shapeliness of the piece of amber. The amber glows through it, beautifying its every line, as it beautifies May Beringer's stuffy room. It stands for the beauty in the lives of the four old women (Mrs. Bloxam, the charwoman, is not to be excluded), it stands for their love and their lust and their cruelty and their tenderness, for the devils that surge between the walls of the dark old house and for the angels that shudder away from its shabby precincts; it stands for Satan, it stands for God. The book smoulders with its morbid fire—the book which in other hands than Hugh Walpole's might have been so drear, so squalid, so full of a dusty realism that it might well have been intolerable.

We have our three principal characters: Mrs. Amorest—Lucy Amorest, silvery, delicate, like her name. (Was it not Marie Bashkirtseff who was sensitive to names?—who found Georges Rochegrasse "like a peal of thunder," Jules Bastien-Lepage "idyllic-sounding," and Tony Robert-Fleury "cold as an epitaph"?) Agatha Payne—parrot-bright, old, sluttish, and surrounded by the flash of colour—"a china dish with oranges, a black-haired doll in a green dress . . . a stuffed bird with crimson wings, a large piece of faded orange silk." It is a favourite device of Mr. Walpole's to give us a character through its inanimate environment; we *know* Mrs. Payne before we come to her actual description—know her gluttony and greed and lust of possession. And there is May Beringer, a cobweb fluttering on an empty grate: a victim of the gentility of the age and of her parents' determination to rear her as a lady, which is to say, without education. Three old ladies, who should by rights (they have all passed the bounds of their seventieth birthdays) have outlived their passions, bound together by poverty in the "windy, creaky, rain-bitten house in Pontippy Square."

From such premises the unwary reader is led to anticipate the mildest of conclusions: for the gentle Mrs. Amorest, widow of

an unsuccessful poet (and even although we never meet him, M Walpole troubles to give us a list of the inconsiderable works of Ambrose Amorest : "Tintagel, A Drama in Five Acts," and "The Slandered Queen!" How inevitably the sympathy of the writer leaps towards the writer), is not one round whom the tragic situation readily develops itself. Her tragedy is the relatively mild one of poverty and patience. May Beringer muddled thoughts cluster about the love of her life, Jane Betts the donor of the amber. And Mrs. Payne's seem to be bound up in a slab of marzipan.

The character of Agatha Payne is one of the most powerful and hideous of all the Walpole gallery; her body reminds us of a Rops, her soul of a Gustave Doré.

"Agatha's soul was like a house of many storeys. In youth she had lived in the top storey, attic in shape but with a truly fine view from the windows. Here there had been light, air and fine prospects. Then as the years passed she moved down on to the middle floor, where she was exercised about the furniture of the bedroom and held elegant receptions in the drawing-room. After the middle years she moved definitely on to the ground floor, and lived during a great part of her time in the dining-room, nibbling at the crystallised cherries squeezing the pears on their china dish, and slipping into her mouth the chocolate almonds. There was no view from the dining-room windows.

"But the first time she stumbled down over the dark stone steps into the cellars was one day after her husband's death, when her sister-in-law came to visit her. She hated her sister-in-law, because her sister-in-law was afraid of her. She hated and despised her, so she pushed her down the cellar steps in front of her, made her scream, showed her the dark, dank place, and hauled her up again. For herself, she saw that there were things in the cellar that interested her—rows of dusty wine-bottles, spiders' webs, and broken furniture. She came to live down there almost entirely. Of course, here there was no view at all."¹

¹ *The Old Ladies.*

Even so, one feels that all might have been well for Agatha Payne, had she not indiscreetly brought down with her from storey to storey a thing which belonged in the top attic: the love of beauty. She might have been quite satisfied among her wine-bottles and her spiders' webs, had she not carried against her naked side this irritant object, whose feverish quality waxed rather than waned in its latter-day surroundings.

Such plot as *The Old Ladies* may be said to contain centres in Agatha Payne's lust for May Beringer's amber: a lust so powerful that it overrides Agatha's sinister interest in poor little Mrs. Amorest's hoped-for legacy. The possession of the amber becomes the motive power of her life, in pursuit of which she is prepared to employ every occult force.

And here comes another of Mr. Walpole's studies of cruelty, perhaps the most petty, the most malign of any that he gives us. As we trace the hideous sequence of Agatha Payne's spiritual attack upon the poor, quavering, unregulated mind of May Beringer, it is inevitable that we should ponder a little upon the persistence of the novelist in sounding repeatedly, in such a variety of keys, the same chord. What is Hugh Walpole's conscious or subconscious motive in drawing our attention again and again to the diabolic power of cruelty?

The Old Ladies is, chronologically, only the spiritual preparation for *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair*; it warns us that worse is coming, that we must be prepared to look upon more frightful horrors still. It marks a change in the relationship of author and reader; it is severe, astringent and implacable in character. The personally conducted tour through the countries of the mind to which, with so much confidence in our guide, we have entrusted ourselves, goes astray: what are these lands into which Mr. Walpole is leading us? Has he missed the track? Are we lost in a maremma—we who came out so confidently to view the fair terrain of the romantic country? And not the least disturbing of our experiences is the change in the character of our guide, upon whose *bienvveillance* we have come to rely, and who now has drawn apart from us, become remote, aloof and

even judicial. And as we whimper our "*Come e duro calle*," he draws us across a threshold above which stands an inscription at which we do not need to look, hearing the voice in our ears which says:

"Here thou must all distrust behind thee leave;
Here be vile fear extinguished."

There is nothing finite about Mr. Walpole's demonstration of evil; like Virgil, he leads us deliberately through the Inferno in order to bring us to Paradise. It is part of Mr. Walpole's creed that it is impossible to understand heaven unless one has understood hell; and here, one takes leave to point out, is where the theory of the woolliness and irrationalism of Romanticism breaks down: for, while Realism is brittle, fragile, and incapable of resisting for long a determined attack, Romanticism is tough, wiry, pliant and crafty in its seeming concessions, which are no more than breath-pauses which reinforce its determination to have its own way. Through evil Mr. Walpole brings us to the elucidation of good, and thus justifies, to those who demand justification, his descent into the infernal regions. He does more; for he proves to us that the passage through hell is the logical way to the kingdom of heaven, and shows us that if we shirk this means of approach, our power to appreciate the glory and splendour of the kingdom is limited by our inexperience.

The emotion which he most constantly evokes in his readers is compassion, tenderness, which is the true Christ quality; he invites us, not to condemn, but to pity, and if by chance we should fall into condemnation, it is obvious that we have misunderstood Mr. Walpole's message.

Now, the question arises, how far does the novelist reckon to employ his art in the enforcement of a moral aim? How far is he justified in using his desk as a pulpit?

"All Art," said Oscar Wilde, "is perfectly useless." He meant non-utilitarian. We have had many protests in the past against the use of the stage as a pulpit; it has been urged again and again that the theatre is a place of entertainment, not a

tribunal at which one is required to decide moral or political issues. This, it need hardly be pointed out, is the herd-attitude to the theatre; it is an attitude of mental and moral indolence which has had disastrous influence on the English theatre, and is directly responsible for the Hollywood invasion. It is essentially selfish, for it makes no provision for the intellectual, or even thoughtful, minority, whose requirements are, apparently, too trivial to be recognised. *No moving picture has yet been produced, in England, Germany or America, which offers to the intelligent public an unadulterated and sincere picture of human conditions.*¹ Even in *Disraeli*, probably the best piece of work that has ever come from the studios of all three countries, we suffer the sentimentalisation of the immortal character of Mary Ann! At the end of thirty years of experience, the mentality of the kinema in Hollywood (which sends us the majority of our films) is still the mentality of the custard pie, and its appeal is levelled at the kitchen-maid and the office boy.

The case of the theatre is different: here we have progress smothered by mental sloth, by that basic indifference to art which I have referred to as a defect of the English temperament. The process of anæsthesia of the critical taste of the public by spectacle, begun by Beerbohm Tree and carried on by Cochran, is responsible for the present-day attitude to the theatre, which fails, lacking the spectacular, or, alternatively, the pornographic interest, to draw its patrons.

Yet is there a single artist who, if he be completely sincere, is unconscious of a message lying behind his art? Is he consciously to repress this message, and serve up froth, at the bidding of his patrons?

Art is the expression of a man's soul; it is the formula of his conception of beauty. Every man has a right to his own formula. The measure of the degree of the beholder's intelligence lies in his power to accept many formulæ and to reconcile them all with the common force which lies behind them.

¹ Since writing this the reproach has been partly wiped out by the production of *Mädchen in Uniform*. One against how many?

An artist who deliberately employs his art in the propagation of a religion—whether theistic or atheistic—is the victim of a divided interest; it is not likely that he will be completely successful in either. But since it is practically impossible that an artist of strong beliefs should keep these beliefs out of his work, it is almost inevitable that he should be, in a sense, the preacher of a gospel. What I would emphasise is that his preaching is spontaneous, sub-conscious, and subject always to his sense of artistic fitness. His gospel may be that of Jesus Christ or of Beelzebub, but to him it remains a gospel, and he is as powerless to prevent its influencing his work as Canute was to stop the waves. And quite inevitably the power of his art will be measured by the power of his beliefs.

The artist as novelist is less hampered by the difficulty of expressing his beliefs than the artist as dramatist. The public, which refuses unconditionally to pay fifteen and six for a stall, to get into a boiled shirt and skimp a dinner to listen for two and a half hours to a sermon across the footlights, will settle complacently enough into its arm-chair and accept its morality at twopence a volume from the lending library. The English public is congenitally amenable to literary moralising, although it sets a limit even to this. The moralist must take care not to overstep the bounds of the popular preacher in the fashionable church. There are certain things which must be taken for granted, certain discretions which must be observed, as in addressing a mixed congregation. The public resents the violation of these discretions—and Hugh Walpole comes perilously near to violating them in *The Old Ladies*.

For *The Old Ladies* is as uncomfortable a book as *The Captives* was the reverse; in it he removes the cushions from under our buttocks, and the hassocks from our toes, and, while our bones make cold acquaintance with the bare plank of our resting-place, and there is not the least question, in our discomfort, of our nodding off to sleep, he forces us to contemplate matters which make our minds as uncomfortable as our bodies.

And it is not in this novel that we shall find the solution of

Mr. Walpole's motives; for the end of *The Old Ladies* is as remorseless as its development. Agatha Payne scares May Beringer to death, and meets her retribution of madness in the empty house, from which, pale relief in such a sombre conclusion, Mrs. Amorest escapes. Yet we cannot think that the escape of Mrs. Amorest matters; hers is the character which leaves the lightest impression on the story; she is the gentle, foolish onlooker at the cat-and-mouse game played between Agatha Payne and May Beringer.

"May Beringer was dead. There was no doubt of it.

"Agatha drew back, holding the amber in one hand, folding the wrapper over her with the other.

" 'I didn't mean that!' she whispered huskily. 'I didn't mean that!' There was a sound at her feet. The dog crept from under the bed and stood looking up at her. She looked down on him, then stood stroking the amber with her hand. She went back to the bed, smoothed the counterpane. The body lay now as though it were asleep, only the eyes were wide. She stood, thinking. She went to the mantelpiece, placed the amber upon it, then very quietly stole from the room."¹

The amber passes out of the picture; chill settles upon it, darkness, and the sound of a dripping tap; and a mad old woman waiting in an empty house for the revenge of a dead old woman. . . .

No, not in *The Old Ladies* shall we find the solution of Mr. Walpole's motives; for that we must go to the third of the Polchester novels, the lovely, the brave, the optimistic *Harmer John*. We close the door of despair upon Agatha Payne, and open it ten years later, to welcome a valiant prophet.

The simple, direct and profoundly moving story of Harmer John could only have been written by one who has travelled every inch of the road that Mr. Walpole indicates to his readers; who has arrived after long, patient search, at the ultimate Good.

In order fully to appreciate the perfection of the heroic

¹ *The Old Ladies*.

character as typified by Harmer John I would refer those readers to whom his works are not already familiar to Carlyle; I would suggest that the first four of the lectures included in *Heroes and Hero-Worship*, the Hero as Divinity, as Prophet, as Poet and as Priest are, each in their way, interpretative of Harmer John's character; that to know them is to increase our knowledge of him, and our understanding of Mr. Walpole's aims.

For Harmer John is Divinity in that he is the symbol of God in man; he is Prophet in that he brings with him the God-message; he is Poet in that his soul swings towards beauty as a flower towards the sun; and he is Priest in that he dedicates his life to the service of his ideal. For such a one there is no death; he is, to paraphrase Mr. Walpole's words from the book which is at the metaphysical extreme from the one we are now considering—"his own immortal master." When Harmer John dies he does no more than consummate his godship; he returns to the Whole of which he was but a shining fragment. At least, that is the conclusion which Mr. Walpole leaves with his readers.

"In man" (says Carlyle) "still there is the *same* altogether peculiar admiration for the Heroic Gift, by what name so ever called, that there at any time was."

In creating Harmer John Mr. Walpole spoke straight to the heart of Everyman, in terms intelligible, not only to his literary admirers, but clear as daylight to every man and woman who happens to pick up the book. He appeals directly to one of the strongest instincts of mankind, the instinct to admire, to deify; and, with sure instinct for that which is most admirable, he leads them, not to the man-made, machine-made, facile "hero" of modern fiction, but to the feet of God.

Harmer John, a young Swede, comes like a breeze into the stuffy world of Polchester, falls in love with it, and with the daughter of his landlady, and decides to establish himself there as a gymnastic instructor. Out of his love for Polchester is born his determination to put his experience at its service; he sees, in the physical betterment of the people, the possibility

of their spiritual betterment. All that is wrong, sordid and mean in the town he ascribes to its ignorance, which he believes it is his duty to remedy.

"Indeed," says, once again, Carlyle, "Valour is the fountain of Pity, too;—of Truth and all that is great and good in man."

Harmer John brings his pity like balm to the Polchester slums, and the result is what you might expect. He suffers, at first, the dangerous and delightful distinction of becoming a vogue; he is so admirable an advertisement of his own system that the aristocracy of the town flocks to his banner. Had he confined his activities to catering for them, to giving lectures, to pummelling the rounded sides of Canon Ronder, all would have been well; but when he turns his attention to Seatown, to that section of the community most direly in need of his ministrations, he finds himself caught in a tangle of ulterior motive, of secret, dishonourable interests.

Polchester does not want a prophet, a priest, or a redeemer; it wants, quite simply, a smart, agreeable young gymnastic instructor, of whom it can be municipally proud; who will look after its adipose and its muscles, and leave its intellect and its morals alone. Maud Penethen wants, equally simply, an attentive lover whose prestige will enhance her own. Whereas Harmer John dreams of building the New Jerusalem in Polchester, of making the town the centre of a spiritual and artistic renaissance.

Polchester turns ugly—as it turned ugly over the affairs of Archdeacon Brandon. It fulminates over the politics of the Seatown slums, in which Harmer John insists upon taking so officious, so unwarrantable an interest. The few who remain well disposed towards him warn him to keep his finger out of that particular pie; but Harmer John—Dreaming John—refuses to alter his course. Some of the youthfulness—one of the qualities most in his favour from point of view of his supporters—drops from him when he realises that, instead of friends, he is surrounded by enemies. He becomes the fighter, the thing at bay, stubborn with the obstinacy of desperation. "Blow, blow,

thou winter wind." Hard on the heels of man's ingratitude comes the desertion of his sweetheart. It is the hand of Maud Penethen that passes to Harmer John the hyssop and the vinegar; she gives him his choice between bowing to the opinion of Polchester and losing her. His agony on the plain is the agony of Gethsemane, his victory Christ's victory over His Temptations.

When he meets his end in a brawl in the Seatown slums, it seems as though materialism triumphs, but how little this triumph amounts to is shown in its aftermath: in the fall of the influence of Canon Ronder—Harmer John's most implacable enemy, as he had been the implacable enemy of Archdeacon Brandon. In the fall of Ronder is symbolised the destruction of all that is base, selfish and impure in motive. In the reconstruction of the town and the demolition of the slums we see the town's repentance for its blindness; and in the belief of Maud Penethen that her lover is not dead is to be assumed the groping of her purblind little soul after the light which it denied.

The story of Harmer John is the story of Jesus Christ, set into the idiom of modern life, and quickened by the gaiety, the humour, the optimism and vivid joy in living of its hero. It is the history of the super-Romantic, beaten by the forces of Realism, only to rise again from the dead among the cloud of unseen witness which commands the thoughts and the actions of men.

In conclusion, it only remains for us to examine the element which binds these three diverse tales together: tales in which Hugh Walpole has shown us the influences, respectively, of Good and of Evil upon a community.

The connective link is, obviously, Polchester itself, of which Mr. Walpole gives us so detailed a description that it has actually been possible for one of his (American) admirers to draw a plan of the town, from the information scattered through the three novels.

So actual a place is Polchester that the geographically-minded

POLCHESTER

reader is inclined to get out the map of Cornwall to assure himself that it really exists; its river, its green, its High Street, its Circulating Library, its slums, its hostelrys, its Assembly Rooms, its fair-ground—the settings for its County Ball, its Horticultural Show, its Fair, the events of the Polchester year—tease the memory with a sense of familiarity. Surely we passed through Polchester a year or two ago? That monument—the Brytte monument: and there was good cider at the Dog and Pilchard, and we bought postcards at a little dark library—and, driving back from Carpledon one evening, through country

“so beautiful in its rich luxuriant security, the fields bending and dipping to the tree-haunted streams, the hedges running in lines of blue and dark purple like ribbons to the sky—”¹

—was not our peace disturbed by an echo of that amazing quarrel between the two clergymen in the Bishop’s wagonette, which ended in Brandon’s continuing the journey on foot, while Ronder drove in prim security, on, into Polchester?

But, apart from what one may term the geographical certainty of Polchester, the town has that strange personality which Hugh Walpole, true to his romantic dæmon, bestows upon his places. Like Treliss, Polchester has a living soul, which influences its inhabitants, not, as in the case of Treliss, towards Faery, but towards darkness, mystery, intrigue. The soul of Polchester is the Cathedral, and it is singular how, behind the beauty of its descriptions, one senses an inimical force, a dread individualism that threatens all who come in contact with it. Our first glimpse of the Cathedral is, one feels, the truest:

“The Cathedral hung over him, as he stood, feeling in his pocket for his key, a huge black shadow, vast indeed to-day, as it mingled with the grey sky and seemed to be taking part in the direction of the wildness of the storm.”²

All its subsequent moods of beauty cannot efface that first sinister impression.

¹ *Harmer John.* ² *Ibid.*

“Indifferent to man, strong upon its rock, hiding in its heart the answer to all the questions that tortured man’s existence—and yet, perhaps, aware of man’s immortality, scornful of him for making so slight a use of that—but admiring him, too, for the tenacity of his courage and the undying resurgence of his hope.”

For each man who approaches it it has a different meaning, a different message, and, smouldering with the sense of the misuse to which it has been put by those who, professing to serve it, have brought their vanity, their pride and their arrogance into its shadow, it governs the life of Polchester. Its beauty and its terror lie across the three books, and all there is of beauty and of evil in Polchester is drawn towards and emanates from its dark pile.

An interesting parallel to the above passage is to be found in D. H. Lawrence’s *The Borderline*, where Katherine Farquhar stands outside Strasbourg Cathedral, in the chilly square, after nightfall:

“There it was in the upper darkness of the ponderous winter night, like a menace. . . . Mystery and dim, ancient fear came over the woman’s soul. The cathedral looked so strange and demonish heathen. And an ancient, indomitable blood seemed to stir in it. It stood there like some vast silent beast with teeth of stone, waiting, and wondering when to stoop against this pallid humanity.

“And dimly she realised behind all the ashy pallor and sulphur of our civilisation lurks the great blood-creature waiting, implacable and eternal, ready at last to crush our white brittleness and let the shadowy blood move erect once more, in a new implacable pride and strength. Even out of the lower heavens looms the great blood-dusky thing, blotting out the Cross it was supposed to exalt.

“The scroll of the night sky seemed to roll back, showing a huge, blood-dusky presence looming enormous, looking down, waiting its moment.”

CHAPTER SEVEN

“THE YOUNG ENCHANTED”

THE serious consideration of children in relation to the art of the novel may be said to be a development of the nineteenth century. Up to this moment, the child in literature was mainly treated as a puppet figure—and very charming and attractive some of the puppets were: irresistibly they recall to one's memory the matchless pianist, the incomparable dancer of the marionette theatre. Not all, however, achieve this completeness: some are mere *fantoccini*—the little hollow heads fixed on limp bodies of cotton material which one draws like a glove over one's hand, and manipulates in a primitive, but none the less amusing, fashion. Without the hand which animates them they lapse into mere rags of papier mâché and tinsel.

What I am trying to convey is that the children of the earlier novelists were essentially the projections, on a reduced scale, of the adult thought which conceived them: like the *ombres chinoises* that one may see in a certain Montmartrois cabaret, they are no more than the shadows of their projectors, flung casually on the background of the evening's entertainment: an accessory, an appendage, no necessary part of the programme, something easily to be admitted, and having absolutely no relation to the spirit of the cabaret itself.

These children have no credible life of their own; they are treated, either as contributory factors to the importance of the adult character, or they are grown-up people seen through the wrong end of a pair of opera-glasses. It is as though, since the days of Shakespeare's *Marnilius*, an attitude of wilful blindness grew up towards children, towards their existence as individuals,

and their importance in the social scheme. It is safe to say that from the period which produced Mamillius and Prince Arthur down to the days of George Eliot, English literature affords no authentic picture of child life, the awkwardness and insincerity of child portraiture reaching its climax in *The Fairchild Family*, a book only to be read to-day in the same spirit of curiosity and research which prompts a visit to a museum, to examine Early British relics. The "child" cult of to-day—when articles on Child Welfare, Child Hygiene, Child Occupation and so forth crowd the popular Press—was very evidently not a part of the earlier period. Children, in those days, were regarded as literary nuisances, and forced into moulds which were but tiny replicas of their adult prototypes.

It is not to the novelist but to the historian that one must turn, for reassurance that the children of the pre-Victorian ages were not disagreeable little prigs, dwarfs, or angels.

"My Lord," writes one little "black boy" to his tutor, about the year 1639,

"I would not have you take too much phisicke for it doth all waies make me worse and I think it will do the like with you. I ride every day and I am ready to follow any other direction from you. Make hast to return to him that loves you.

" CHARLES, P.

"To my Lord Newcastle."

Nor Richardson nor Fielding nor Mrs. Sherwood ever succeeded in capturing the lovely blend of mischief and affection which this boyishly brief letter contains.

The birth of the nineteenth century, however, liberated a fresh influence upon English literature. Something had been done to prepare the ground for its reception by Mary Wollstonecraft, of whose charming *Lessons, the Cave of Fancy and other Fragments* Mr. E. V. Lucas has said, "I know of no early instance where a mother talks down to an infant more prettily." The same cannot be said of her *Original Stories*, written before

the author became a mother, in 1788; but in the delightful tales which she wrote for little Fanny Imlay, Mary Wollstonecraft foreshadowed the simple and understanding attitude which was, in time, to be adopted towards children in literature: and while she, in England, was thus approaching her subject directly, the continent was being electrified by Rousseau's bolshevik Emil. The names of Pestalozzi and Froebel took on a growing significance, and the lay-figure Child ceased to be, or, at any rate, was broken up into fragments, called Children, and acknowledged to possess individual characteristics and to live a vivid and varied life of its own.

Now, I do not mean for a moment to suggest that the novelists of the period owed direct inspiration to these theorists: one may search in vain, in the works of the Victorian novelists, for any Froebelian or Pestalozzian motive. Even when earnest ladies in Liberty dresses began to fill their houses with miniature perversions of Morris furniture, and started the Kindergarten system in a muddled sort of fashion that involved a lot of business with strips of coloured paper, buckets of wet clay and bundles of cane, the fiction writers forbore to reflect any of these activities upon their pages. It was left for H. G. Wells, nearly a quarter of a century later, to make merry at the expense of these educational antics in a novel (*Joan and Peter*) which is practically a treatise on rearing the young.

Tom Brown's Schooldays is agreeably free from any orthodox theory; Dickens, when he avoids sentimentality, achieves some good photographic studies of children; Thackeray caricatures them—because he cannot avoid caricature: the Baynes children and Frederick Lovell are little monstrosities—but they are caricatured from the life. George Eliot and Charlotte Brontë in their super-seriousness, show no Emilian consciousness.

The point is that each and all of these novelists profited, or their art profited, from the fact that, through the ardour of the theorists, children had become recognised as social entities, were no longer to be treated parenthetically, but to be afforded their full dues as units of the community. And it was left to the

twentieth century to discover that children had a community of their own, completely separate from the adult community which they were supposed, respectfully, to share. The attitude of the novelist inevitably reflects the attitude of his period, and thus we find, in the Victorians, a growing consciousness of the importance of children, from a sociological, a sentimental and a dramatic point of view.

Children are no longer to be fashioned to a formula: all little boys are not greedy, all little girls do not like dolls. Having assimilated, successfully, these elementary facts, the nineteenth-century novelist is threatened by another pitfall. This pitfall is the tendency to treat his childish characters too subjectively; they are, too often, projections of the author's own childhood, and this, naturally, results in the production of another formula. It is the author's own ego who, too often, speaks in the personalities of these literary children, and whose prejudices lend to their characters a fictitious strength and consistency almost as far from real childhood—which is, above all things, inconsistent and inconsecutive—as the false maturity of Mrs. Sherwood's children.

Speaking generally, one finds these nineteenth-century children making the best of an adult world, rather than living in a world of their own. The children's world had not been discovered in the time of Jane Austen: but with how delicious a grace her children adapt themselves to that other! How charming, how happy, how well-conditioned are they, in comparison with the Reeds, Polly Home, the immortal Jane herself! There is something sinister about the children of Charlotte Brontë: they seem to have been conceived in a green light. They are like little test-tubes, filled with the passions and prejudices of their creator, that hiss and seethe and bubble when they are held over the flame of her inventive ardour. Sometimes their conversation is quite incredible; it does not appear to have occurred to Charlotte Brontë that the vocabulary of a child is necessarily not the vocabulary of an adult. Helen Burns being delivered at the age of fourteen of this:

“THE YOUNG ENCHANTED”

“ ‘ We are, and must be, one and all, burdened with faults in this world; but the time will come when, I trust, we shall put them off in putting off our corruptible bodies; when debasement and sin will fall from us with this cumbrous frame of flesh, and only the spark of the spirit will remain—the impalpable principle of life and thought, pure as when it left the Creator to inspire the creature: whence it came it will return; perhaps again to be communicated to some being higher than man—perhaps to pass through gradations of glory, from the pale human soul to brighten the seraph! ’ ”—

—is only a degree more ridiculous than the ten-year-old Jane thus apostrophising John Reed, who had thrown a book at her:

“ ‘ Wicked and cruel boy! ’ I said. ‘ You are like a murderer—you are like a slave-driver—you are like the Roman Emperors! ’ ”

“ I had read Goldsmith’s *History of Rome*, and had formed my own opinion of Nero, Caligula, etc.”

Even if we accept Nero and Caligula, Jane’s hatred of her cousin is far too articulate to be convincing. It is Charlotte Brontë, not Jane Eyre, who hates John Reed. And it is Charlotte Brontë who suffers the torments of the damned in the death-chamber of Mr. Reed: just as, later on, it is Charlotte, the Haworth spinster, who sacrifices her desiccated conception of love on the altar of prudery, and, true to the moral code of her day, takes refuge in flight and an assumed name from her lover’s pursuit.

But the importance of the juvenile portrait of Jane lies in the fact that Charlotte Brontë had realised that for full knowledge of one’s character one must begin with its childhood, which contains the germs of all future life; and in describing the fortitude of little Jane at Gateshead and Lowood she prepares the mind of the reader to accept the relationship between the older Jane and Mr. Rochester.

The autobiographical note sounds in George Eliot, but with how great a difference! It is the difference between Haworth

and Colton: between the bleak and bitter heath of the Wes Riding and the lush meadows of Warwickshire: between nature starved and nature rich and full. A more adorable child character than Maggie Tulliver has never been created; once again Maggie, the child, is there to interpret Maggie the woman; she is there to give us more love and knowledge of the rainbow being into whom she develops. She is conceived in tenderness, instead of in austerity, and for this reason her childhood comes nearer to the modern conception of childhood than that of Jane Eyre. George Eliot does not fall into the artistic error of attributing to little Maggie the opinions of Marion Evans at the age of forty-one. But she joins hands with Charlotte Brontë in allowing to her child characters an intense and vivid spiritual life, and thereby advances their literary importance. Neither of these writers however, has found it possible to take a child as hero of a complete novel; childhood to them is but a stepping-stone, is too fleeting, too fragile a state to support in itself the structure of a novel.

Dickens was the first to do it—in his peculiar blend of extravagance and journalistic sentimentality. But he was careful to give his child characters ample support: he did not trust them unaided by a powerful adult interest, to carry the development of the plot on their frail shoulders. As for Thackeray and Trollope, they are content to follow the older pattern: the children are there for the sake, one might say, of convenience—to add “local colour.” A childless society is impossible: Thackeray—reluctantly—orders down his young Bayneses and young Lovells from the schoolroom, and, having done so, takes his revenge on them by presenting them at their worst. Trollope’s attitude is more Olympian, but equally lacking in geniality in understanding. Such a glimpse as he affords you of his “little people” is, one feels, fairly presented—so far as he himself is capable of presenting them; but children are, to him, utterly extraneous, and, like Charlotte Brontë with Helen Burr occasionally he is betrayed into a monstrosity: Grace Crawley at the age of nine, is “in Greek Delectus and the irregular

verbs"!—But while we cannot imagine Helen condescending to Miss Temple's seed cake, it is refreshing to find Grace "attracted by the sound of sugar plums, in spite of the irregular verbs"!

How lovely and how vital, by contrast, are the children of Meredith! Clara Middleton, Aminta Farrell on the threshold of young ladyhood, and the rest. He treats them with a charming seriousness—the attitude of all others most acceptable to childhood: no Olympian condescensions, none of the affectations of equality which, from would-be-young uncles and aunts, send prickles up the spine of the young and transform them into little human hedgehogs for the time being. He brings a grace and gallantry to his contacts with boys and girls that inevitably call out the best in them; he respects their conventions, conducts no embarrassing voyage of discovery into their privacies.

The beginning of the twentieth century found children fully established in the foreground of literature; and simultaneously there sprang up two definite schools of thought, each with its separate treatment, which existed to exploit this absorbing new subject (from a novelist's point of view) the Child. Both agreed that the Child had a world of its own, as varied and considerably more exciting than the adult world which, up to this time, it was supposed to share. They were unanimous on the point that this world was a world of fantasy, of pure romance, existing in the child mind alone, and that it had some indistinct connection with Wordsworth's *Ode on the Intimations of Immortality*. The point on which they split was whether to treat this world seriously or as a joke: and was it to be written about from the child's angle of vision—which meant taking it seriously—or from an adult angle—which meant laughing at it?

A grand opportunity for unbridled sentimentalism; a grand opportunity for a new brand of humour. The novelists took it in their own ways: in rapid succession they gave us *Dream Days*, *Bimbo*, *Helen's Babies* and *Other People's Children*, the Penrod books, the William books, *Joan and Peter*: each of these represented the individual novelist's reaction to the problem

called children, in some cases consciously literary, in others a *divertissement*; in the case of H. G. Wells, theoretical and didactic. Joan and Peter, as characters, are of less importance than their Uncle Nobby's method of bringing them up. The Penrod books and William give us the adult conception of the small boy as a sort of wistful clown. *Bimbo* is the creation of feminine neurosis, archetype of that most tedious of literary characters, the dream child. All these books, all these writers—Habberton, Tarkington, Richmal Crompton, Kenneth Graham, show us the Child in an attitude, posed by his creator so as to receive to the best advantage the rays of the authorial illumination. The Tarkington-Crompton children are objective creations, *Bimbo* and the young adventurers of *Dream Days* as much the projection of their creators' personalities as *Jane Eyre* is of Charlotte Brontë's.

It remained for Hugh Walpole to forge the connective link between these self-conscious aspects of child character and the pitiless unsentimentality of *High Wind in Jamaica*.

Childhood, said Hugh Walpole, is not a joke; equally, it is not a tragedy. It is simply a little commonwealth, whose inhabitants take themselves very seriously indeed. It is the incubation hutch for all that the adult human being afterwards becomes. It holds, in a miniature scale, all the pangs, penalties, delights, sorrows, triumphs and failures which the grown-up person is presently to experience. It is a time of adjustment, of separation from that which was Before and of preparation for that which is To Come. It is the preliminary to a transition period of exquisite painfulness—that period known as adolescence, when the child has to take that next step forward, into maturity, as into the dark, no longer supported, encouraged by the presence of his Friend, Who, having led him tenderly through the passage of birth stayed a little while to comfort, before withdrawing into the Invisible.

In *The Golden Scarecrow*, the first of his "child" novels—and, in itself, less of a novel than of a series of interludes from

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childhood—that aspect of Hugh Walpole's Romanticism is much in evidence: that sense of the Unseen, of the "trailing clouds of immortality" which surrounds infancy and early childhood. It is practically impossible to avoid writing of childhood romantically. Childhood is the time of make-believe, the time when logic takes a back seat, when the cow is just as likely to jump over the moon as to remain peacefully chewing cud in the meadow. Unfortunately many writers who recognise this aspect ignore the fact that childhood is also a time of pitiless realism, when an ache or a pain or a disappointment can blot out romance and change the cow into a bull—and an inimical bull at that.

The ten characters in Hugh Walpole's baby-house range from Henry FitzGeorge Strether, eight months old, to young John Scarlett, to whom we bid farewell on the threshold of his life at boarding-school. Each has his or her own little precious, perfect existence, complete as a shell; and each is accompanied by the "Friend for little children," the lovely, benign Character, the protective Shadow, that grows ever a little more and a little more indistinct as childhood ripens towards adolescence, and the claims of the material world begin to supersede those of the spiritual one. The Friend is ever-present to Henry FitzGeorge Strether in his perambulator, and almost lost to young John Scarlett, as he goes to school for the first time:

"He had forgotten somebody. Somebody? Something?"

"He gave it up. When he remembered the person, him or her, he'd send a postcard from school. He felt the money in his pocket and was a little cheered. He opened a picture paper with the air of a man of the world, but even as he read he knew that 'someone or other' had been forgotten. . . ."¹

The Friend is rejected by the formidable Sara Trefusis, only to triumph in the end:

"'I've caught you after all. You *have* been soft. You've yielded to your better nature. Try as you may you can't get

¹ *The Golden Scarecrow.*

right away from it. Now you'll have to reckon with me more than ever. You see you're not stronger than I am.'

"Before she opened the door of her room she knew that she would find Him there, triumphant.

"With a gesture of impatient irritation she pushed the door open."¹

What is this, after all, but the following, rendered into the idiom of the Little world? :

"Halts by me that footfall:
Is my gloom, after all,
shade of His hand, outstretched caressingly?
'Ah, fondest, blindest, weakest,
I am He whom thou seekest!
Thou dravest love from thee who dravest Me.' "

And 'Enery, who, although he was six years of age, could hardly talk at all, and liked to spend the days twirling pieces of string round and round or looking into the fire, lives in the shade of that Hand: we know that, because 'Enery is fated to remain one of those defenceless innocents, his Friend will never, never leave him, but will go forward with him into the grey years at his most need to be by his side.

"*Combien j'ai douce souvenance!*"

There is something more than remembrance in Hugh Walpole's child studies: something deeper than observation: something as little to be confounded with that sentimental "understanding" on which almost every writer of children prides himself as science is to be confounded with the superficial psychology of the writers of novels for children: whose whole art lies, not in presenting to children themselves as they are, but as they imagine themselves to be. It is an essence of childhood that no other writer—fully occupied in being either humorous or tragic at the expense of the young—has given us, distilled in the air of purest Romance.

¹ *The Golden Scarecrow.*

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For myself I must confess that the only children in modern literature who seem to me to afford a parallel with Hugh Walpole's *Golden Scarecrow* symposium are the exquisite Mimsey and Gogo with their invisible attendants, *la fée Tarapatapoum* and *le Prince Charmant* :

"She would start at the pale birches that shone out against the gloom, and shiver if a bough scraped her, and tell me all about the Erl-king—'*mais comme ils sont là tous les deux*' (meaning the Prince and the Fairy) '*il n'y a absolument rien à craindre*'."

This is not such delicate symbolism as Hugh Walpole's, but it amounts to the same thing, although the one is depicted through the long perspective of the subjective imagination, and the other is purely creative and objective in its treatment. The author of *Peter Ibbetson* stands outside the Little world, surveys it wistfully across park and paling and the deep stream that divides the juvenile from the adult life, while Hugh Walpole fearlessly crosses the bridge and comes by bridle-path and avenue to the very door of the Little house itself: knocks, and enters in.

The Jeremy books are less ethereal in their structure than *The Golden Scarecrow* ; briefly they are the saga of a boyhood, from the eighth birthday up to the day when Jeremy Cole gets into the First Fifteen at Crale. The charming incident of the Noah's ark ushers in the character of Uncle Samuel—spiritual brother to all Hugh Walpole's artists and men of letters: Uncle Samuel, Hans Frost, Henry Galleon, Harmer John share what must be called, for want of a better term, the divine intelligence: the recognition of values beyond material ones, which is denied to ordinary mortals. Uncle Samuel is to Jeremy what Hans Frost is to Nathalie and Henry Galleon to Peter Westcott.

"They are unto us pillar fires,
Seen as we go,
They are the city's shining spires
We travel to."

In fact, Uncle Samuel, of whom the Cole family (with the exception of Jeremy) is ashamed, because he is fat and untidy, wears a blue tam-o'-shanter when he goes out, and walks down Orange Street in carpet slippers—not to mention his incorrigible habit of sponging on his relatives and repaying them by blaspheming against the Cathedral and all its associates—stands for the physical embodiment of the Friend whom, presumably, Jeremy left behind him in his infancy.

“ In the middle of the carpet was a village, a real village, six houses with red roofs, green windows and white porches, a church with a tower and a tiny bell, an orchard with flowers on the fruit trees and a green lawn, a street with a butcher's shop, a post office and a grocer's. Villagers, Noah, Mrs. Noah and the little Noahs, a field with cows, horses, dogs, a farm with chickens, and even two pigs. . . .

“ He stood, he stared, he drew a long breath.

“ ‘ It comes all the way from Germany,’ said Aunt Amy, who always made things uninteresting if she possibly could.”¹

That is how Uncle Samuel interprets a small boy's birthday, in the terms of his own romantic spirit—and in contrast to the rest of Jeremy's family, whose quite splendid and utilitarian gifts of turnip watch and paintbox, delightful in themselves, wane in the light of Uncle Samuel's appeal to his nephew's romanticism. Is not Uncle Samuel preaching to Jeremy in this gift that all the loveliest things of life are the perfectly useless ones?

There is no need to describe these three books in detail; they represent, as has already been said, the recreative pause between Hugh Walpole's serious novels. Yet apart from their own interest, which is considerable (Jeremy's sisters and companions are worth more than a cursory acquaintance), no student of Walpole can afford to ignore them: either as a stepping-stone to his adolescent studies or on account of their intimate connection with Polchester. The Jeremy books should rightly go into the

¹ *Jeremy*

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chapter on Polchester, for here we have Little Polchester, a Polchester at the opposite extreme from the Polchester of *The Cathedral* and *The Old Ladies*. It was for Jeremy and his kind that the Arcade, where Joan Brandon and young St. Leith went shopping and bought their dolls as souvenirs of their meeting, was invented; Harmer John and Maude Penethen surely walked in the Meads where Jeremy met the Sea Captain. But whereas in the Polchester of *The Cathedral* the grown-up people had it all their own way (and a nice muddle they made of it) and Jeremy and his sisters were kept in their places, on the principle that children should be seen but not heard, Little Polchester is the glorious property of Jeremy and Hamlet and a few privileged grown-ups, such as Uncle Samuel, the Sea Captain, and is at the mercy of the Night Raiders.

Jeremy at Crale is bound to draw comparison with other school stories: with *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, with *Stalky and Co.*, with that brief but so lifelike glimpse of Cuper's in *Lord Ormont and His Aminta*, with more recent studies of school life, wherein, since *The Loom of Youth*, it has become fashionable to write at length and in detail about a moral (or immoral) condition which Thomas Hughes dismisses airily with the comment that "the small friend system was not so bad from 1841-1847." And this is bound to lead on to a discussion as to how far novelists, as a whole, have succeeded in their portrayal of school life; a fascinating subject, upon which space does not permit the present writer to enlarge.

Jeremy at Crale is extraordinarily like a modern Tom Brown at Rugby; we even feel a physical resemblance between the stocky Jeremy and Tom. Staire might stand for Flashman, the Dormouse, much more credibly, for young Arthur, in the modern idiom. The football interest is there, the internecine wars, the bullying, the slow rise of Jeremy to authority in his house. The book has far more plot than its forerunners—simply because school life brings with it more cumulative event than the life of the nursery. But again, Hugh Walpole is inside the Little world of which he writes, while Hughes stood apart from

it, on an Olympic mound of judgment; his whole story is defocused by his moral bias, by the necessity for preaching which, in the preface, he ingenuously admits, while Hugh Walpole does not concern himself with moral issue; he sets out to tell a story and tells it supremely well.

The interest of these "child" novels lies, perhaps, in Hugh Walpole's acknowledgment of the importance of the Little world, and in his tacit admission that the two worlds will not "mix" to the artistic satisfaction of the novelist. He is as chary as the Victorians of admitting child characters into his adult novels, and only once, in *Wintersmoon*, does one feel that the child character is indispensable. In *Fortitude* and in *Wintersmoon* the plot is vitally affected by the death of a child, but only in *Wintersmoon* does the figure of the child occupy a position in the foreground of the reader's interest.

We now arrive at Hugh Walpole's transitional characters: those which, in the unhappy "standing water" between childhood and maturity, make most claim upon our understanding, our love and our patience: and of these, first and foremost, is my darling Henry Trenchard, to be met with first in all the throes and agonies of growing up, in the first chapter of *The Green Mirror*, and later achieving the dignity of a volume to himself (for, although his sister Milly shares its honours, it can never be said that a Walpole woman competes with a Walpole man for the reader's interest) in the book from which this chapter takes its title.

"My God, I must do something! . . . I *will* do something! . . . But suppose I can't!"¹

Here is the authentic cry of youth, panic-stricken before the immensity of life, shrinking before the gales that fledgeling wings are so ill equipped to battle with. At nineteen years of age Peter Westcott had taken the plunge, had found himself a job in a second-hand bookseller's and rooms in a London boarding-house; at nineteen young Henry Trenchard was imprisoned in the Green Mirror:

¹ *The Green Mirror*.

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"—a long thin youth, his hair untidy, his black tie up at the back of his collar; one white and rather ragged cuff had slipped down over his wrist, the other was invisible. His eyes were grey and weak, he had a long pointed nose with two freckles on the very end of it, but his mouth was kindly, although too large and indeterminate. His cheeks were thin and showed high cheekbones; his chin was pronounced enough to be strong, but nevertheless helped him very little.

"He was untidy and ungainly but not entirely unattractive; his growth was at the stage when Nature has not made up its mind as to the next, the final move. That may, after all, be something very pleasant. . . ."¹

Thus young Henry Trenchard, prisoner of the Green Mirror, family prejudice and his own temperament. He reminds one of a modest, extraneous wildflower that has got into a lusty herbaceous border, and in dread of extirpation is doing its very utmost to convince its supercilious neighbours that it is one of them. One feels that it stands a poor chance.

How skilfully Hugh Walpole builds up his family blockade round the shrinking figure of Henry! The parents, the aunts, the sisters, the fearful old great-aunt and the grandfather are all fashioned from that British oak which is the backbone of England—and, incidentally, of the majority of Hugh Walpole's novels.

With these enormous shadows looming over him, Henry becomes almost drivelling: dithers between his instinct to avoid at all costs drawing their critical interest upon himself, and his desire to take his place as a grown-up Trenchard in their grown-up company: piling *faux pas* on *faux pas*, for ever tormented by his blundering inability to reconcile his actions with the nobility of his motives.

Nowhere is Hugh Walpole's favourite device of the dual personality more clearly exploited than in the character of young Henry Trenchard, where Henry Trenchard the *preux chevalier*

¹ *The Green Mirror*.

—one might almost speak of this Henry as Sir Henry de Trenchard—whose full flowering is depicted in *The Young Enchanted* is for ever at war with that rueful hobbledehoy who loses his collar-stud in the vestibule of Jules'. Whose soul flames with idealism as his brow flames with pimples.

“So young was he, so crude, so sentimental, impulsive, suspicious, self-confident, and lacking in self-confidence, loyal, ambitious, modest and conceited that it was not strange that Philip did not understand him.”¹

The Trenchard background against which Henry moves so gingerly that one trembles with apprehension for him is so important that one must examine it later; it is enough for the present to say that where he is weak, they are strong, where he is vacillating they are impelled by the sense of direction, where Henry is doubtful they are positive. They despise young Henry for his un-Trenchard-like weakness—but not nearly so much as he himself imagines; it is quite incredible that they should not be—like ourselves—very fond of him. But they are tactless about his appearance, about his ways with cuffs or handkerchiefs, and they refuse with one accord to recognise, not only Sir Henry de Trenchard, but even young Mr. Trenchard, member of a London club—and, not infrequently, they forget him altogether.

The most poignant chapter in *The Green Mirror* is that which records Henry's “night out” with Philip Mark, his sister's betrothed: that experience, so exquisitely distressing, so ecstatic in spite of the contretemps with which it was attended—of being treated as a man instead of a schoolboy; with its tragic ending.

“‘They've turned the roa' upside down,’ he whispered confidentially. ‘We mustn't lose each other.’”²

The commonplace tragedy of a young man unaccustomed to conviviality being overcome by three whiskies and sodas derives its importance from Henry's character; it is impossible not to feel resentfully towards Philip Mark for having allowed this to

¹ *The Green Mirror*.

² *Ibid.*

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happen. But when Fate deals the cards for the next hand, it is seen that Henry, not Philip, holds the trumps; the only trouble is that he has not the remotest idea of how to play them. With the secret of Philip's life in Moscow in his possession, Henry is distracted to know how to use it, so as most to benefit, least to damage, his adored sister, Katherine. And inevitably he makes a mull of it.

"Tell," says Sir Henry de Trenchard.

"Oh, hang it, I *can't*," mutters young Henry.

"Why not?" persists Sir Henry, implacable.

"Well, for one thing, it will make Katherine perfectly wretched."

"Stop a moment," says Sir Henry. "Have you not assured me, over and over again, that you would face fire, stake, torture and the block for Katherine's sake?"

"What about it?" parries young Henry, not with pugnacity.

"Have you stopped to consider what will happen to your sister if this cad marries her, and treats her as he treated the Russian girl?"

"Of course I have; but what is one to do about it?"

"Tackle *him*," prompts Sir Henry.

"And get laughed at for my pains, very likely! Good heavens, what do you take me for? I tell you, men of the world look on these things differently—one passes on, you know—er—every man, at some time or another——"

"Don't talk such blasted twaddle!"

Young Henry lapses into a sulky silence, but de Trenchard refuses to let him alone.

"If you haven't the gumption to deal with Mark himself, what about telling your father?"

"Thank you for nothing!" snorts Henry.

"Well?"

"Look here," says young Henry Trenchard, desperately. "There's just one thing that I simply can *not* face; and that's the idea of losing Katherine. If I were to tell father, and he sent Philip away, she'd never speak to me again."

Sir Henry de Trenchard shrugs his shoulders and turns on his heel; and thus, intermittently, the battle goes on—while Millie reports in her diary that she'll kill Henry one day: "He thinks he's so important and has got a great destiny, whereas he can't even keep his face clean." And meanwhile Philip tells Katherine the whole history, and she comes to her own decision, while Henry tells Millie and drowns his sense of responsibility at Cambridge. And Millie holds her tongue, and leaves it to Henry on his return, to make confusion worse confounded by telling Aunt Aggie! For the secret gnaws at him until he cannot contain it, so he always goes and tells—the wrong people!

And when, eventually, the cat is out of the bag, Henry is overwhelmed by the discovery that his mother—his *mother* of all people—has known all along! And when Katherine brings the whole hurly-burly to conclusion by her elopement with Philip Mark our young Henry passes through the gate of wounded love and pride into the kingdom of manhood. He is travelling, although he does not know it, towards his own first love adventure, so lyrically told in *The Young Enchanted*.

Henry's romance with Christina Jennsen is pure fairy-tale, an emerald in a pinchbeck setting: the emerald is Henry's romantic adoration for Christina, the pinchbeck the quite dreadful surroundings in which their idyll is staged: the doubtful establishment into which Henry falls on his knees, in pursuit of his lady.

Throughout *The Young Enchanted* it is Sir Henry de Trenchard who is in charge: the adorable young Henry loses his hat in the first few pages, and bangs a few doors and shouts a bit, at moments when a touch of magnificence might have been more profitable: but for the most part it is a very perfect, gentle knight of twenty-three or so who ambles through the fairy-tale, now lost in a dream of *Clarissa* and *Udolpho* and a certain little painting in water colour by Lovat Fraser and a Regency bookcase stolen from his Westminster home, now rushing forth to tilt at windmills with all the ardour of the young and single-hearted. I love Henry so much that I feel I ought not to be

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writing about him: love his physical clumsiness, his spiritual grace, his shyness and his nobility. He is the most romantic of all Hugh Walpole's young heroes. His worship for Christina runs side by side with his devotion to his employer, Sir Charles Duncombe, and his love and solicitude for his young sister, Millie, who is pursuing her own adventure of love and living while Henry skirmishes between Hill Street and Shaftesbury Avenue.

It is only fair to state that the affairs of Millie occupy at least half of this novel, and that they are very interesting affairs; while Henry prances through the lists of Love, and breaks a lance, by the way, for Sir Charles Duncombe, she divides her attention between her parvenue employer—one of Hugh Walpole's most sympathetic creations—and a second-rate young man called Baxter.

The book is packed with character and incident so carefully and delicately drawn that one marvels how the author has contrived to manipulate so much material so dexterously, with such an air of abundant leisure. This atmosphere of leisure may be said to be a hall-mark of Hugh Walpole's technique. Without exceeding the legitimate length of the seven-and-sixpenny novel, without haste, without confusion, without overcrowding or slovenly treatment, he manages not only to keep his readers interested in a multiplicity of characters, but to persuade us that not one of them is dispensable!

It rather reminds one of the jugglers who keep flying in the air at the same time a couple of tinsel balls, a copper disc, a brightly coloured bottle, a nosegay of flowers and a top hat. There is the same coolness, the same lack of flurry, the same certitude. Although each object differs in size, shape and weight from its companions, it is seized as surely, dispatched on its next parabola as neatly. When these objects are at rest on the table before the juggler it is seen that each is separate and has no relation to the next: but the moment that they are dispatched on their flight through air they develop a kind of unity, they are inseparable parts of the pattern which the artist flings about himself like a rainbow, that he can control at will and check as suddenly as he began.

Not content with the affairs of his Duncombes, Jenssens, Platts, Bell-Halls, Martins, Baxters, Light-Johnsons and the rest—what does Hugh Walpole do but draw in Peter Westcott, with Clare his wife, and old Mrs. Trenchard! And not casually; not as if he said to his assistant, having his hands fully occupied—“Just lift that table with the china on it a little nearer the foot-lights, because I want the audience kept in memory of my previous tricks.” Nothing of the sort; with his nosegays and top hats wheeling in the air he reaches out with the greatest assurance, and adds a shot-gun and a hassock (I hope the shade of Mrs. Trenchard will forgive my likening her to a hassock: anything more inept as a simile can hardly be imagined) to his collection—and Hoop-la! away they spin. How can he keep these unwieldy additions in play among their comparatively light companions? How can he?—Watch Signor Valpoletti. The hassock will knock down the bottle! Will it? The band rises to crescendo: the magic circle swings out for the last time, its tempo decreasing; as each object descends the juggler retains it, until his arms are full: the red light at the side of the proscenium fades out, the turn is over; Signor Valpoletti bows towards the audience, the curtain descends.

And this, I suggest, ladies and gentlemen, is the way the novel should be written: with the same dexterity, the same nonchalance, the same exquisite sense of balance and the same finesse in conclusion.

There is one point of difference, of course: when the juggler picked up the shot-gun and the hassock he did so in order to call attention to his own cleverness, to enhance the dramatic value of the trick. But when Hugh Walpole added Peter Westcott and old Mrs. Trenchard to his symposium of characters he did not do it as a matter of literary prestidigitation: it was manifestly impossible that Millie should marry Bunny Baxter: but whom was she to marry?—for marry she must, since this is a fairy-tale and a romance and must not end too wistfully. The pitiful marital situation of Peter Westcott was at the back of Mr. Walpole's mind—as it had been ever since he wrote the last

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chapter of *Fortitude*, and here is the grand opportunity to set it right. The utmost of which Mr. Walpole can be accused is of a harmless, avuncular match-making, for which the timely death of Clare clears the way. And the death of old Mrs. Trenchard lets down the curtain upon a certain tragic episode in the life of young Henry, and closes it for ever.

There is rather a lot of death in *The Young Enchanted*: Mrs. Trenchard dies, Clare Westcott dies, Sir Charles Duncombe dies; but is this not in the romantic tradition? Would the enchantment of Henry and Millie have been complete, had not the Dark Angel brushed them with his wing? It is part of the lesson of their enchantment, that life is more tragic than death: and to each of them death comes as the liberator. And in drawing his novel to a close with that emblem of national romance, the Unknown Warrior: in allowing the last scene of the young Trenchard's enchantment to be played out on November 11th, 1920, Mr. Walpole leaves them secure in their romantic kingdom, from which, one may be certain, whatever may come to Millie, young Henry will never, never stray.

Dear young Henry, with all that remains to him of his romance with Christina—the scarlet feather! This is the sort of distant, remote, hill-top touch in which Hugh Walpole excels. How could so frail, so ethereal an affair, conducted in some far “reaches of the moon,” come to a materialistic consummation? Instinctively one feels that no earthly-fashioned phial can contain the wine of Henry Trenchard's love; we leave him, with his pince-nez awry and his hair a little ruffled, to:

“Raise up the banner of forlorn defence,
A jest to the complacency of crowds—
Bright-haloed with the one diviner sense:
To hold itself as nothing to itself;
And in the quest of its imagined star
To lose all thought of after recompense.”

In treating *The Green Mirror* and *The Young Enchanted* as mere backgrounds to the character of young Henry Trenchard,

I am aware that I have done grievous injustice to them in other respects (especially in the case of the former, which is a really important novel of the Trenchard succession)—injustice for which I hope to make amends later on. But as this chapter has dedicated itself, in the headstrong fashion of chapters (which refuse point-blank to conform to any preconceived notions of their optimistic authors), to Hugh Walpole's juvenilia, I have no option save to continue this examination of the novels whose main interest focuses upon a young hero.

These novels are, of course, *The Wooden Horse*, *Prelude to Adventure*, and the first part of *Fortitude*: that which concerns the adventures of Peter Westcott up to his marriage; for when a man marries the pulse of his romantic life alters its rhythm, and he ceases to be, in this particular sense, "the young hero" of whatever narrative he happens to adorn. Harmer John, the perfect heroic type, having conveniently packed himself into the chapter on Polchester, the characters which remain for us to examine are Robin Trojan, Olva Dune and Peter Westcott.

In *The Wooden Horse*, his first novel, Hugh Walpole introduces his favourite symbol, the place with a soul. The Cove is the forerunner of Treliss and Polchester; but whereas the souls of these places are omnipotent, and have power to mould their inhabitants to conformity with their unseen hosts, the Cove is at the mercy of a materialistic community whose slogan is "Progress." Robin Trojan stands, indirectly (and, incidentally, unconvincingly: for surely tradition is inseparable from a family like the Trojans?), for the new order, while Mary Bethel stands for the dreams, the aspirations, the ideals of the dying Cove.

He is a harsh young man, this Robin Trojan: the very antithesis of our Henry Trenchard. He is, as I have remarked in an earlier chapter, a surprising creation for a young novelist: self-centred, conceited, snobbish, yet cheap in his amorous adventures and unreasonable in his demands upon life. His faults leap to the eye more swiftly than his virtues; in fact, he is a mass of juvenile insincerities, whether in his poetic aspirations

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or his affair with Dahlia. Created in the year 1909, he is so completely the post-war young man, in his attitude to sports, his literary society, his deprecation of heartiness, and his "boy friend," that he could be made to fit, with the minimum of adjustment, into a Noel Coward play. We are not really sorry when Robin's Trojanism receives a check through Dahlia, who declines the small-part role for which Robin has cast her, and, with the assistance of a bundle of letters, thrusts herself very effectually into the position of a leading character.

Whereupon Robin proceeds to exemplify very prettily the caddishness of tradition, its letter without its spirit, and, falling into a panic, dispatches the S O S to his relations to come and extract him from the predicament into which he has got himself.

The Wooden Horse of the novel is Robin's father, who brings into the old Trojan stronghold, on his return from Australia, all the elements most dangerous to its old formalism. Perhaps Mr. Walpole will forgive me if I make a frivolous comparison between Harry Trojan and the heroine of "The New Girl at St. Hilda's." He comes to the House of the Flutes very much as Peggy, or Angela, or Marjory come to the new school, and every hand—including his son's—is against him, because he does not know the conventions; they seem to him foolish and unnecessary. Eventually, of course, Peggy "wins through" and establishes herself—generally by some act of superhuman courage, moral or physical—as "leader of the school." Harry Trojan's triumph lies, materially, in his handling of the letter situation, and, morally, in the adjustment of his relationship with his son. But here the analogy stops: for the House of the Flutes does not "lie down and worship": the House of the Flutes, in the persons of Clare and Garrett, rejects Harry in the end; it is only when he has exorcised their spirits that he is able to bring into it, as into an empty shell, the woman he has chosen as his second wife.

The collapse of Robin's self-sufficiency, the undermining of his belief in the divine right of Trojans, his slow and painful recognition of the fact that his uncle and aunt are powerless to

help him, combine to break through the prejudice which, for their own reasons, these worthies have fostered. They are so desperately anxious that Robin shall be a Trojan, so fearful of his father's influence, so jealously determined that Robin shall not be taken from them, that they have raised a bulwark between Harry and his son. But now Robin makes the discovery that Trojans are no good: that it is simply no use being a Trojan: what he needs is just a human being who can get him out of his intolerable situation.

Not the least of the many virtues of this remarkable first novel is its admirable portrayal of Robin's youthful and egotistical exaggeration of the importance of his quite trivial and harmless *affaire*. Here we have not only the spirit of youth, but of 1909. In 1932 the least that could have accounted for Robin's extraordinary perturbation would have been the recollection of a week-end spent at Folkestone, or perhaps a too ardent sequel to a cocktail party. In 1909 the fact of having been engaged to a young woman, and written her some rather enthusiastic letters, was quite enough to send a young man of Robin Trojan's temperament panicking to his elders; the breach of promise case which a young man of to-day would wear like exclusive club colours was enough, in prospect, to set Robin's teeth on edge and his hair on end.

And it is sheer, ignoble fright that turns Robin's thoughts to his father: that takes Robin to his father's room: that paves the way for the scene where all barriers go down between father and son, and Robin ceases to be a Noel Coward young man, and simply becomes a child, crying with terror of a boggy man in the night. This scene, beautifully written and conceived, leads on to Robin's definite choice between his uncle and aunt and his father, and suggests the triumph of the Real over the False Tradition. For the Real, as we know, derives from beyond the Beyond; it is entangled in the roots of human existence and its inspiration is from the angels; while the False is that which human beings have created to be the cloak for their ignoble actions and the protection of their duplicities.

The opening of *Prelude to Adventure* reminds one, irreverently but irresistibly, of the classic "'Hell!' said the Duchess." Let those whose minds incline to levity derive as much satisfaction as possible from this beginning; for there is nothing else in the book which is likely to cause them amusement. Following the theme of *The Hound of Heaven*, it is one of the gravest and most beautiful of the earlier period: briefly, it is the history of a young man's discovery of God.

Having presented us, on the first page, with a corpse and its murderer, Hugh Walpole proceeds to draw for us a third type of young hero, in the person of Olva Dune, and to show us his reactions under a third type of enchantment: for, as the young Trenchards are under the spell of youth itself, and Robin Trojan under the spell of false tradition, so Olva Dune is victim of a sombre witchcraft, the outcome of his own action, that chases him "adown the Titanic glooms of chasmed fears."

"'There is a God after all.' That was the immense conviction that faced him as he heard, slowly, softly, the leaves, the twigs settle themselves after that first horrid crash which the clumsy body had made."¹

And his terror of that God is the motive of the book, which ends suddenly, like the broken arch of a bridge, leaving us to wonder how Olva Dune completed his journey.

The whole of the story, so far as it concerns Olva Dune, is conditioned by certain material facts which must be accepted before the reader can come to complete understanding of the novel. Just as, in *Above the Dark Circus*, one has to accept the fact that Dick Gunn's stomach is empty, and that his point of view is the point of view of a starving man, so we have to bear in mind Olva Dune's Spanish heredity and his intellectual aloofness from his fellow men. It is not conceivable that the accidental death of Bunning, from a blow struck in anger, would have affected in the same way the average young Englishman, whether pre- or post-war.

¹ *Prelude to Adventure*.

There would have been the same horror, the same nervous collapse, temporary, probably recurrent; but sooner or later—to begin with, intermittently, but gathering strength for each return—the vigorous British mind would have found the right name for the thing: the thing which might just as easily have happened on the playing-fields or in a man's rooms, in front of a dozen people, instead of here, in the chilled and dripping wood that reduced a man's soul and brain to pulp. Manslaughter, of course, not *murder*: an accident, for which, if one was unlucky, one would have to pay in imprisonment—only there was no reason why one should be unlucky. Lawrence—that same Lawrence whom we met in *The Secret City*—would have taken it this way; and in time his horror of his own deed would have been consumed in satisfaction that the world was rid of one more crawling thing.

The trouble with Olva Dune is that in the moment of Carfax's death he, the atheist, becomes conscious of the existence of God. Beside this more awful knowledge what does any prospect of human punishment matter? Henceforth what can avail his intellectual brilliance, his distinction in sports and lectures, the admirers who fawn upon him, the excitement which surrounds alike his moments of indolence and his moments of activity—all that he has accepted with so high-handed, so princely an insolence? He is Childe Roland, committed to the Dark Tower: "nought else remains to do." The whole shining circus, of which he is the central figure, stands still, the lights go out: and a still, small voice whispers in his ear: whispers, did he but know it, "*I am the Friend whom you have forgotten.*"

"Life had not hitherto been so wonderful a discovery that the making of it had been entirely worth while":¹

—but now! To stand alone in an empty circus ring: to feel, rather than see, all the others creeping away in the darkness!—

¹ *Prelude to Adventure.*

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"Is that the wind dying? Oh no;
It's only two devils, that blow
Through a murderer's bones, to and fro,
In the ghost's moonshine."

—to know that one is alone for ever, for ever, for ever: save for that Unseen, that Implacable, which seized the moment of one's most weakness to impose Its strength upon one!

Life becomes a hideous matter to Olva Dune: as it must be to any man who drags behind him the perpetual consciousness of a crime. What difference does it make that the crime was committed inadvertently?—that the world, or at any rate one person in it, and that one, by all the mocking gods, of no personal value to the criminal, is actually benefited by the crime? The inflamed nerves of Olva lead him widdershins through Cambridge and end by forcing him into a companionship which, sane, he would scornfully have rejected: the companionship of Bunning, who burdens Olva with his hero-worship, who is more abject, more ignominious, more puerile and invertebrate and hysterical in his devotion than mortal mind can endure: who actually, in the spirit which drives sex-starved spinsters to the knees of good-looking Anglican priests, comes to Olva with his religious doubts!

" 'They don't want me at home. They don't want me here. I'm not clever. I can't do anything. . . . And now God's gone . . . I think I'll drown myself.' "

" 'Nonsense. You mustn't talk like that. God's never gone.' "

" Bunning dropped his hands, looked up, his face ridiculous with its tear-stains.

" 'You think there's a God?' "

" 'I know there's a God.' " ¹

What would not Olva Dune have given in that moment to have been able to reassert his lost atheism?

¹ *Prelude to Adventure.*

"As the door closed behind him, swiftly Olva was conscious again of the Pursuit.

"He turned to the empty room—'Leave me alone,' he whispered. 'For pity's sake, leave me alone.'"¹

It is, of course, the frightful Bunning who finds out at last and in a final paroxysm of Olva-worship tells Rupert Craven that he himself, Bunning, murdered Carfax!

The most difficult part of the story to accept—and here, perhaps, the author betrays his youth—is Mrs. Craven's confession to Olva that she has murdered her husband. But the romantic must have the courage of his coincidences. Murder is not a common crime in England; and even if two people with an undiscovered murder on their respective consciences do happen to live within a mile or two of one another, it seems highly unlikely that they should meet and discuss their experiences.

Murder is, of course, as extravagant a word to use of Mrs. Craven's disposal of her husband as it is to use of Olva's disposal of Carfax; actually her share in Craven's death was passive, while Olva's in that of Carfax was active. But like Olva she has fled down the Titanic glooms of the years, and the knowledge that he is not alone in his agony lightens his burden. In confession to Mrs. Craven, Olva passes into the first stage of his redemption; the second stage is his confession to Margaret Craven, whom he loves; and we leave him on the threshold of the third stage, which, presumably, is to be attained through life itself. There is symbolism in that last game of football, when all in Olva that had failed him since his hour in the wood gushes back, leaps fountain-high in a silver shaft of achievement, and, poised for a millionth part of eternity in space, his soul cries out in radiant happiness:

"'I have fled—I am caught—I am held. . . . Lord, I submit.'"

The construction of the novel is purely romantic, based on a

¹ *Prelude to Adventure.*

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foundation of realism; its positive beginning, its ambiguous ending—in the sense that Olva has yet to pass through his third stage before claiming Margaret—mark the author's break-away from the traditional formalism of *The Wooden Horse* and *Maradick at Forty*.

Fortitude, of which Peter Westcott is the young hero, must strike the present-day reader as a positive pantechnicon of a book. As a matter of fact, young Mr. Walpole was removing; having already four novels to his credit, he was getting ready to take possession of what one may call his Second Period. He was moving, in a manner of speaking, from a pleasant house in Kensington to a much finer house in Park Lane, and he was looking forward to the improved accommodation which should display all his treasures to better advantage. One cannot refrain from the thought that Hugh Walpole to-day is slightly appalled at all the stuff which young Mr. Walpole crammed into his pantechnicon.

Fortitude—although a much stronger novel than *Maradick*—is *Maradick* run to seed; it is *Maradick*, and *Jeremy at Crale*, and *The Duchess of Wrex* and *The Young Enchanted* and *The Old Ladies* and goodness knows how much beside; it contains numbers of shamelessly romantic characters and as many conventional ones; it brings back half the characters out of *Maradick* and *Prelude* and joyously adds a few score on its own account; in it young Mr. Walpole runs his flag of Romanticism up to the very top of the mast, and, out of sheer *joie de vivre*, swarms half-way up after it himself; it is as full as an egg with dreams, aspirations, affirmations, friendships, quarrels, cruelties, kindnesses, apprehensions, optimism, despair—until, when it draws to a close, antic imagination conjures up the picture of young Mr. Walpole pushing the last footstool into the pantechnicon, closing—with difficulty—the door, turning the key, and mopping his brow. That's done, at last! When he wrote *Fortitude*, Hugh Walpole had not learnt selectiveness, as he had done ten years later, when he wrote *The Cathedral*; he had not practised legerdemain, as he had by the time he wrote *The Young Enchanted*—or he would

surely have conjured into thin air some of the confusing elements which overcrowd his *Fortitude* pantechicon.

It is as young a book as *Maradick*, but written under a darker star; if *Maradick* celebrates the joy of youth, *Fortitude* celebrates its pain. The character of Peter Westcott is the very antithesis of the galumphing, totally irritating Tony Gale; from the threatening presence of his father, who hangs like a dark thundercloud over his childhood, he takes refuge in the company of the between-world characters which it is Mr. Walpole's particular delight to draw. These characters appear less like ordinary creatures of flesh and blood than emanations of the Cornish soil which engendered them. Mr. Walpole is remorseless with his Peter, plunging him for a start into the company of Frosted Moses, Dicky the Fool, Zachary Tan and Stephen Brant—each in his fashion the embodiment of the Romantic spirit, and each tinged with the slightly supernatural element which we encountered—in a more positive form—in Andreas Morelli. Old Frosted Moses, whose aphorism—“ ‘ ’Tisn't life that matters! 'Tis the courage you bring to it ' ”—gives out the motif of the book, may be said to stand for the wisdom of the ages, Dicky the Fool for the wisdom of simplicity, Zachary Tan for intellectual wisdom and Stephen Brant for the wisdom of the pure in heart. The only wonder is that young Peter, exposed in tender youth to these symbolic influences, does not turn into a symbol himself. However, he contrives to remain a very convincing normal boy, youth, man, and it is to be assumed that he profits from these wisdoms, and draws them after him through the years when he struggles towards establishment in a material and spiritual sense.

We follow him from Scaw House to Dawson's, a very fearful school in which, perhaps, we are not wrong in tracing some resemblance to the “S——” that remained as a nightmare of the author's own youth. Here Peter becomes indubitably Jeremy-ish. We go with him in his companionship with Stephen Brant, Peter's “most wonderful person in the world,” who teaches him the importance of physical courage, as old

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Frosted Moses had taught him the importance of spiritual courage. One of the most glowing passages that emerge from the welter of this novel is Stephen's saga after his fight with the husband of the woman he is in love with: his rapture of triumph that breaks out into a chant with a deep recurring chorus :

“ ‘ I got 'im one on the neck and I got 'im one between 'is lovely eyes and I got 'im one on 'is lovely nose, and 'e went down straight afore me, and—

“ (Chorus) ‘ I've battered 'is bloody carcass.’ ”¹

The story, clipped of its redundancies, is simple enough: the history of a youth who goes forth into the world in search of his own soul: who flees before heredity and learns in time that he has conquered it: who swings between a world of harsh reality and a world of dreams, snatching now at the one and now at the other, uncertain which is the permanent, until he discovers that both are permanent, and that the measure of a man's worldly success is his power to reconcile the one to the other and to conquer them both. Stephen Brant helps him to conquer the first, and Henry Galleon shows him how to conquer the second.

We follow him to London, in the romantic company of Mr. Zanti, we establish him in Herr Gottfried's bookshop, where he is involved briefly in anarchism, and we leave him—so far as our *Young Enchanted* are concerned—with *Reuben Hallard* published, with Henry Galleon at his elbow, and the cold shadow of Clare Rossiter, whom he is to marry, lying across his horizon. The book continues with his married life, the birth and death of his child, and Clare's desertion, with that Cardillac who has popped back into this novel from the *Prelude to Adventure*. And it closes with the list of Beatitudes elsewhere quoted in this book, and on a note of spiritual supremacy that leaves the reader wistful, envious. . . .

¹ *Fortitude*.

CHAPTER EIGHT

HUGH WALPOLE AS A SHORT-STORY WRITER

LOVERS of the short story may complain with justice that they are extremely badly served, although, as a glance at any bookstall will show them, the short-story output has never been so enormous as it is at the present time. Unfortunately, its vigour lies in its quantity, rather than in its quality, and the magazines which to begin with staked their existence upon the short story, have assisted in lowering rather than in raising its standard. The magazine short story is no longer, save in isolated instances, to be regarded seriously in an estimation of this branch of writing, and it is a matter for regret that it should continue to be so regarded by a considerable section of the reading public; not, of course, the intellectuals themselves, but what one may speak of as the Ordinary Reader, who bases his objection to short stories in general upon the examples he meets with in the magazines.

Now, even readers with a limited acquaintance with this class of literature can hardly have failed to remark, of recent years, a change in magazine make-up. Originally designed for the exploitation of fiction, an increasingly large amount of space is now devoted to the topical article, to feminine journalism (clothes, cosmetics, housekeeping and interior decoration), and to film and theatre news. There are few magazines which nowadays rely for their circulation upon fiction only, and the short story, once the backbone of the magazine, is pushed out of its key position and actually fulfils the function of padding. It has lost its artistic status; it is in effect a stop-gap; an adver-

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tisement of dentifrice crashes into its climax; its conclusion is liable to be cut down to leave room for someone's review of gramophone records. It has become a poor relation, to be chivvied into corners and sacrificed to ulterior interests; any sub-editor is at liberty to chop bits out of it in order to fit it into the prescribed space; it can be bowdlerised, repunctuated and ever rechristened, without reference to its author, whose timid protests are nipped in the bud by a take-it-or-leave-it attitude hardly soothing to the sensitive post-creative mind.

It is possible that the exorbitant prices asked by famous writers for their work have had something to do with it. Editor could not be expected to go on paying excessive sums for "name." The great novelist is rarely the great short-story writer, and only a limited number of authors have found it worth their while to specialise in this form. These specialists have gradually evolved a formula, which, as the creative instinct waned, did duty for genuine inspiration.

There is a phrase of the theatre which expresses this exposure of method; it is called "showing one's machinery." By showing their machinery too plainly the short storyists prepare their own defeat. Up sprang a tribe of individuals to exploit the knowledge which the writers had obligingly placed at their disposal. "Schools of writing" made their appearance, which under a variety of guarantees, professed to be able to impart the formulæ of this class of fiction to their pupils.

Now, this would hardly have happened if, in the first place the specialists had been able to keep up their standard. Unfortunately, so subtle, so inspirational a form resents in time the clockwork claim made upon it by editors. The editors themselves are hardly to blame for becoming wise to the fact that writers who are practically in the novice class, and therefore cannot command high prices, are capable, under the tuition of the schools, of turning out a class of work which, in conjunction with other interests, apparently suffices to hold the patronage of their readers. Therefore the price of the short story has shortened during recent years, and few of the "big" write

find it worth their while to expend their energies upon a form that no longer brings an adequate return.

The short story, so far as the magazines is concerned, is doomed; unfortunately, the news of its degradation has spread abroad, and this may in part account for the curious shyness of publishers in accepting volumes of short stories, even from well-known authors, and the reluctance of librarians to placing them upon their shelves. Shutting their eyes to the testimony of the bookstalls, they declare that there is "no demand" for the short story, and that, so far as they are concerned, finishes the matter. It is nothing to them that the salvation of the short story is a matter intimately bound up in our literary future; that the short story may be said to relate to the novel as the sonnet to the epic, and that its salvation is essential to the maintenance of our literary status among the output of other nations.

It is perfectly obvious that the serious writer is not going to turn out hack or formula work to the pattern required by the magazines of to-day, neither is it worth his while, from a financial or an artistic point of view, to interrupt his labour on, for instance, a novel in order to execute a magazine commission. This state of affairs is fatal for the short story and bad for the writer. Not every writer, despite his principles, can afford to ignore popular demand, and produce only high-standard work at low rates of pay: for the sinister fact emerges that the few magazines which cater for a finer literary taste are those which pay the lowest prices.

One would not pay so much attention to the magazine question were it not for the fact that owing to the attitude, already described, of the publisher and the librarian to the short story, the writer of short stories must turn his attention to the magazines if he hopes to exploit his work; and here he is checked by the *idée fixe* which governs the acceptance of short stories at the present time.

The fact that no truly serious subject, handled in a serious fashion, is allowed to intrude upon the pages of magazines, serves, not merely to discourage the writer, but to discredit the

short story among readers whose taste rebels against the shop-made article. According to magazine proprietors there are only two classes of reader: the highbrow, presumably catered for by such a paper as the *London Mercury*, and the lowbrow, whose organs are legion and very amusingly scaled, apparently on a social basis: for there is essentially no intellectual distinction between *Pansy's Paper* and *Flair*, or whatever the latest so-called "society" paper happens to call itself: the distinguishing factor being *snobisme*, pure and simple. There are, as a matter of fact, about two magazines on the modern market which insist, with die-hard integrity, upon a good standard in their fiction, but in speaking of the general these must be ignored, for they exist but to prove the rule.

English short-story writing is gradually becoming Americanised: high-speed, quick-fire colloquialism, in narrative as in dialogue, is enjoying a vogue—a style of writing essentially foreign to the English, which the English attempt in vain, and most unwisely, to imitate. It is therefore said that America has the monopoly of the short-story market, which may be true; but it does not mean that America is turning out the best short stories. It merely means that America has a trick which, at the moment, is successful, because it is, relatively speaking, new. It is related in some way to the talkies; its very sophistication is naïve, self-conscious and opposed to serious standards in art and literature.

The short story may be broadly classified under two headings, which would equally serve to classify the novel: one type basing itself upon psychological experience or observation, and the other upon incident. The first type is rarely if ever to be met with in magazine literature; the second lends itself, unfortunately, to so many falsities, perversities and exaggerations that it has become almost wholly discredited among serious readers. It is upon the latter that the fiction-mongers have built up their pernicious formula, which, involving elements more suggestive of the theatre than of literature, is almost entirely artificial and conventional. There is the old-fashioned convention of the

happy ending; this, one rejoices to say, is on its last legs, but still contains sufficient life to warp many a promising story by its preposterous intervention. That there should be an "ending" at all, in the sense of something conclusive, is ridiculous enough; for the short story is a moment snatched out of time, not a novel in little; and how often does Nature oblige with explanations or solutions of her experiments? There is the convention of the "big bang to begin with and bigger bang to end" which is opposed to all naturalism. There is the conventional character-combination of villain-hero-heroine, with the usual background of lay figures which have to be employed over and over again because the short story of this type offers little opportunity of original psychological development. And there are half a dozen conventional considerations of sentiment and prejudice to be observed, if one hopes to get away with the "incidental" short story.

The psychological short story presents us with an angle of vision; it is coloured by its writer's personality, it concerns itself with development of character rather than with incident, and it is therefore much more truthful, much more readable, for the intelligent, than the former type. And in writing both, the author is governed by the same need of concentration, both of idea and of narrative, of scrupulous adherence to the essential and rejection of the non-essential, which makes short-story writing the most subtle and inspirational of all literary forms. The *good* short story will never come to order; it descends upon one like the gentle rain from heaven, and, most frequently, in a form that the "schools" would deride and tear to pieces with a line or two of able criticism. Upon it lies the glitter of truth; it shines like a good deed in a naughty world and, if one is fortunate enough to capture it, it will probably languish in a pigeon-hole for a long time before a publisher will grudgingly acknowledge its merits and risk its inclusion in a collected volume of one's own, or perhaps other people's, works.

The purpose of this lengthy prelude to the consideration of

the short stories of Hugh Walpole is to point the fact that in his three collected volumes, *The Silver Thorn*, *The Thirteen Travellers* and *All Souls' Night*, it would be difficult to identify a single one of the "immutable" laws laid down by the fiction factories for the guidance of young writers. It is therefore extremely important that interested persons should familiarise themselves with this branch of his work, in order to strengthen their own convictions: 1, that the dramatic opening is not merely unnecessary, it is generally silly; 2, that Nature more often than not refuses to round her conclusions according to the short-story formula; 3, that incident is, on the whole, less interesting than character; 4, that there can be no set rules for the creation of any form of art.

These are opinions shared with the reader not only by Hugh Walpole, but, to name three other distinguished exponents of the short-story form, Aldous Huxley, H. A. Manhood and William Plumer.

Not that one holds a brief for all of Mr. Walpole's stories. He is essentially a novelist, with a novelist's faults of over-stressing the unimportant, of indulging in too protracted preamble; often there is a lack of balance, the story is overweighted, kicks the beam at one end or the other, refuses to get away from the mark, or otherwise behaves as though, instead of being self-contained, it were a chapter of an unfinished novel. But when, now and again, as in *Portrait in Shadow*, he gives us a tale of almost classic perfection, the truth forces itself through to our perception; his ignoring of rule and precept is deliberate, his conception of the short story a thing of his own, not to be hampered by pettifogging literary law, and the story behind the story is the most important thing. His short stories are, in fact, studies of individuals, problems to which he puts Q.E.D. in the form of some shred of incident that hammers in his point.

Of course, the method cannot always be equally successful. In 1921 *The Thirteen Travellers* presented Hugh Walpole at his most sentimental, in the act of laying a wreath upon the tomb of tradition. They are haunted by Beaminsters yet but green in

earth, and across their pages moves the war itself like the shadow of a Zeppelin. The connective idea was good—the effects of war upon a dozen people gathered beneath the same roof in Duke Street, St. James's; but the conclusions which he draws from his individual premises are for the most part sentimental, melodramatic or dictated by the as-you-would-have-it, rather than the as-it-was. The magazine inspiration is evident. Yet even in this collection, the green figs of his experiments in short-story writing, there are two studies of a mordant excellence: *Absalom Jay* and *Miss Morganhurst* make no concessions to popular taste; they stand out almost in terms of the modern Russian ballet, gravely executed upon a curtained stage by dancers of finesse and irony.

The Silver Thorn (1928) is "other matter." It has no connective link, but there are at least six stories of outstanding quality, while the remainder far outsoar his *Thirteen Travellers* achievement.

The six notable stories are *The Enemy in Ambush*, *Chinese Horses*, *Ecstasy*, *The Etching*, *The Enemy* and *The Tiger*. No doubt each reader will have his own preferences; there may be some who will rate *Old Elizabeth* above *Chinese Horses*, or consider that *The Tarn* holds more of the macabresque than my own choice, *The Tiger*. My own selection is based upon the claim that in these six Hugh Walpole is at his most subtle, most psychological and most emotional, and that they are therefore likely to register the strongest impression upon the average reader's mind. In them his artistic aim is obvious, his creed of the short story receives positive statement. To him it is a combination of mental forces, a resultant atmosphere, a point of view, a feeling, rather than a precise arrangement of facts, a juxtaposition of visible forms, a juggling of marionette-humans—in fact, all the false and febrile elements which go to make up the popular conception of the short story.

An English army officer's reactions to a typical Russian family are described with charming humour and delicacy, and with exquisite appreciation of the points of view of both sides.

Chinese Horses, the story of a woman in love with a horse, reveals not merely its writer's gift for conferring life and individuality upon the inanimate, but his recognition of the different forms which passion may assume in human beings. *Ecstasy*, a glorious piece of cerebralism, introduces his favourite "innocent," in the guise of a tramp, who swings a situation from misery to bliss. Both *The Etching* and *The Enemy* give the same evidence of close acquaintance with the emotions of humble folk. In the latter we follow the whole history of one of those formless and unreasonable antipathies—"I do not love thee, Doctor Fell"—which spring up between harmless and well-meaning people; an antipathy which has only to be displayed in another light to discover in it a warm attachment. When Tonks is killed by a motor omnibus, a policeman asks Harding if he is a friend of the deceased. A friend! When all of Harding's life has rolled itself into a ball of loathing about this aggressive, too friendly individual! The question is in itself an affront; yet what is the reply that rises unbidden to his lips?

" 'Yes, I am a friend of his,' said Harding suddenly, 'a very great friend.' . . .

"And the funny part of it all was that that was true."¹

And the funny part of it all is that Hugh Walpole has realised and immortalised the fact that enmity can be as deep and tender a tie as love. One may trace this love of paradox in many of his writings; it bubbles out of his conversation. It is part of the atmosphere of continual surprise in which, both as a writer and an individual, he may be said to live.

The Tiger is a fine and typical piece of writing in which Hugh Walpole is at his best: uneasy, never quite successful in cloaking apprehension beneath the mantle of commonplace, it has much in common with his definitely romantic novels. It is a kind of little cousin of *Above the Dark Circus*: it claims relationship with *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair*.

¹ *The Enemy*; *The Silver Thorn*.

Little Homer Brown comes to New York to stay with friends, to be petted and fêted and flattered into the illusion that he "belongs" there: conceives a sentimental attachment for his American host, and views with rapture the prospect of return. On his next visit, however, his friends the Moodys are out of town, and he is a stranger in the same city. The whole place stretches out into a perspective of brutal impersonality; the illusion of "belonging" vanishes, but Homer Brown is held against his will in a sinister fairyland. He wishes to go home and cannot; summer heat plays havoc with his nerves. He has his dream of the Tiger, and when he wakes it is to the Tiger obsession. He hears, smells and feels Tiger; Tiger is there, present to every one of his senses, save sight. His gradual surrender to obsession is the story, with its grim ending. Many writers would have been content to leave it at that: little Homer Brown dead under a taxi-cab, and the Moodys' conventional horror and regret. Hugh Walpole carries us a step farther.

"About three the next morning, Moody woke up quietly trembling, and at last roused his wife. He talked to her about the poor little Englishman. 'I suppose,' he said, 'staying here in the heat was too much for him. Odd thing that, his imagining that some animal was after him.' He lay there, greatly discomforted. 'New York's getting a queer place,' he said. 'You can imagine anything if you let yourself. All this traffic, for instance. They look like animals at night, sometimes.' He turned and took his wife's hand in his. 'A bit close in here,' he said. 'You don't smell anything, do you? Sort of animal smell.' 'Why no, dear, of course not,' said Mrs. Moody. 'Imagination, I suppose,' said Moody. 'Funny thing if this town went wild one day.'"¹

The most recent of his collected short stories are those contained in the book called *All Souls' Night*, which was published in 1933, between the final volumes of the Herries Saga. Those who admire Hugh Walpole as a novelist, but are not interested

¹ *The Tiger; The Silver Thorn.*

in short stories, must sink their objection to the latter for the sake of adding to their knowledge of Polchester, and the families of Herries and Cole. Reminiscent ghosts flicker through these pages, as though their creator had seized with relief upon the opportunity of adding some vital but hitherto omitted fact to the information he has already given his public in the volumes dedicated to their histories. In *All Souls' Night* he pays tribute to our loving interest in Henry Galleon, in a charming and, one feels sure, autobiographical story titled *Mr. Oddy*.

But the best of the stories break new ground. *The Whistle*—Hugh Walpole's own favourite of all his short stories—appropriately enough calls the tune for all the rest; they all concern themselves with that which lies beyond the boundaries of material experience. *The Whistle* is a very simple story about a man and a dog; no one who knows Hugh Walpole will fail to recognise the portrait of "Blake," the chauffeur to whom Clara Penwin's husband is obliged to give the dog, because she has a foolish feminine credulity towards all the libels that have been written about the fine Alsatian character. "Blake" drives Hugh Walpole about the country, walks with him, goes swimming with him, plays backgammon with him and watch-dog to him; "Blake's" silences are woven into the texture of Hugh Walpole's life. No portrait of Hugh Walpole can be complete unless it has in the background that

"very large man, very fair in colouring, plainly of great strength. His expression was absolutely English in its complete absence of curiosity, its certainty that it knew the best about everything, its suspicion, its determination not to be taken in by anybody, and its latent kindliness. He had very blue eyes and was clean-shaven; his cap was in his hand, and his hair, which was fair almost to whiteness, lay roughly across his forehead. He was not especially neat, but of a quite shining cleanliness."¹

"Blake" is Harold, in every sense the Keeper of Hugh

¹ *The Whistle; All Souls' Night*.

Walpole's door; whose scrutiny you must pass if you aspire to any close acquaintance with his friend and master.

The Whistle is a fine, unsentimental tribute to a dog's nobility, written with a most sensitive understanding of the mysterious mind that suffers behind the voiceless mask of the dog.

The Silver Mask, a Herries story, is an extraordinary example of victimisation, of large-scale parasitism—a little too large-scale to be wholly credible, perhaps: and yet what is not credible when Mr. Walpole's bogies are peering over our shoulders? It is again, one of his ghost-tales that are not ghost-tales, but which vibrate with the Uncanny.

In three of the stories he has taken the unusual step, for him, of conducting us abroad. *A Carnation for an Old Man*, *Portrait in Shadow* and *Spanish Dusk* are placed on Spanish soil, but it is plain that in this setting Mr. Walpole does not entirely trust himself. He will not let go the hands of his English characters; he prefers to show us Spain, as he showed us Russia, through the cool grey English eye, so the effect upon the reader is rather that to be gained by staying in an English hotel, than a close, innately Spanish impression, such as one might gather from living in a *fonda* or an inn of the country. The Spanish coloration is there, and no doubt this will suffice for the majority of his readers; particularly as each of these stories is beautifully written, full of psychological experience and profoundly romantic in spirit. The best of the three, from point of view of construction and sustained interest, is *Portrait in Shadow*; my own favourite is *Spanish Dusk*, in which Hugh Walpole has captured, for all the English view-point, something delicate, tremulous, redolent of the balsams and the myrtles, which evokes the Spanish aura to such a degree that one wishes he had been a little bolder; had wholly cast away his English moorings and trusted himself among the influences which would have enriched his psychical experience.

There is a scrap of a tale, wedged in among the rest, that he has christened *Seashore Macabre*. It is a splinter of horror, retained from childhood's experience, that embodies Hugh Wal-

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pole's richest macabresque gift. *Tarnhelm, or the Death of my Uncle Robert*, is related to it; they are both stories of Cumberland; this second one is wholly fantastic. I remember reading it years ago, when it sent a sickening thrill of horror through my body. It has an Edgar Allan Poe-like conclusion, that poises the reader upon the very summits of terror, an old and evil magic runs through it and holds incredulity at bay. Rightly considered—and by rightly I mean from a realistic standpoint—it is a mere fairy-tale; but it evokes one's youthful shudders over the more "unsuitable" pages of Grimm, which kindly adults imagined was quite out of reach, on the topmost shelves of the bookcase!

Sentimental but True is, like *The Whistle*, a dog story, tuned to a less tragic note. It is, geographically, linked with *The Eldest Taland*, for the scenes of both are laid in Cornwall. In *The Snow* we have murder committed by a ghost, precisely as it was committed in the *Mrs. Porter and Miss Allen* story of *The Thirteen Travellers*; there it was a dead husband who murdered his wife, here a dead wife who disposes of her successor. But what mastery Hugh Walpole has gained in dealing with this well-worn ghost-situation! *The Snow* is one of the briefest of the stories; one's reaction to it will, to some degree, be measured by one's literary sophistication, but it is swift and positive where *Mrs. Porter and Miss Allen* was lumbering and uncertain; it is a good ghost-tale for a fireside gathering on Hallowe'en.

Briefly, the value of Hugh Walpole's short stories lies rather in their emotional than their æsthetic quality. They are highly individual; it would be impossible to mistake their authorship, and they carry with them a blind conviction of truth, in the face of all commonsensical objections.

Precisely as he insisted upon piloting the historical novel into the foreground of public attention, so he insists upon piloting the short story past the reefs of banality and imbecility upon which it is drifting. He writes considerably for the magazines; several of the stories included in the *All Souls' Night* collection have previously appeared in print under a magazine imprint. But he surrenders nothing of his literary integrity in so doing.

His prestige enables him to retain this, and, in doing so, to set a valuable example to all who feel the innate falsity of the accepted short-story form.

Dawdling at will through his narrative, stinting us of no description whether of scene or of person, he creates something so living and so actual that the most literal of the factory-made short stories, the slickest productions of the "schools," appear like collections of dead bones beside his most preposterous inventions. And the word preposterous, be it understood, is merely a concession to the Realists, for to the Romantic nothing is preposterous save the mental attitude that stops short at the testimony of eyes, ears and fingers. By taking a leaf from his charter of independence, and perhaps by being willing to starve a little during the probation period—after all, one can always scrub floors or sell newspapers if one's convictions are sufficiently deep to make such matters worth while—the writer of to-day can in time oblige editors, publishers and librarians to revise their opinions, and the short story will regain its literary status.

CHAPTER NINE

THE MONUMENTALS

WE have reached, in rather an unorthodox fashion—skipping some, and perhaps dwelling unduly on others—the two major novels of Hugh Walpole's later period, the two immediately preceding the *Herries Saga*. They are major, not only in the sense that they contain some of his best writing, but for the reason that each contains the type of character which I have already christened "monumental": which is a creation quite separate and apart from other characters, by virtue of some kind of immortality which Mr. Walpole seems to have it in his power to confer, now and again, upon those characters for which he has a particular affinity.

Let us, before going farther, inquire into the nature of this "monumental," who supports, perhaps, more than his fair share of the Walpolian laurels.

A monumental, as I take it, is a person who has fought his battles, and, by winning them, has attained to some kind of moral and material altitude which lends permanency to his position in society, of whatever elements that society may be composed. His influence is compulsive, the attitude of subordinates to this influence is obligatory, not merely in a material, but in a moral and spiritual sense. It is he who conditions the lives of these with whom he is brought into immediate contact—or, if one likes to put it into a more colloquial form, he calls the tune. There is about him a static quality which makes him something more and something less than the hero. He is, if you prefer it, the hero grown old; his energy is spent, not in the warfare which is the business of the young hero, but in the maintenance of the heroic

status which his earlier experiences have conferred upon him. While the hero is experimental, the Old Hero is content to summarise the results of his experiments. While the hero is doubtful, he is positive. The whole impact and force of his character derives from this positivity, which may be mistaken, as in the case of Archdeacon Brandon, but which loses no iota of its compulsive property on account of its mistakenness.

It is, however, a mistake to associate old age, in the common acceptance of the term, with the Monumental. Age is, after all, a relative quantity; to the child of five her sister at twenty-one is a contemporary of her mother's; young Mr. Walpole at twenty-four wrote a novel called *Maradick at Forty* which betrays the fact that in his estimation forty was, if not precisely the age of senility, at any rate an age of complete responsibility and wisdom. The Reincarnationists tell us that age is not to be measured by the number of years a man has been resident upon this planet. The phrase "I feel years older than you" is not entirely idle: it is at least possible that it may spring from some momentary recognition of past experience unlimited by birth. "Nelson was Francis Drake": this seems as reasonable an explanation as any of the disproportionate wisdom and strength occasionally evinced by very young people, whose known experience of life cannot possibly be commensurate with their displayed intelligence. It may be a case of trailing clouds of glory, or it may be something even more incredible to the materially-minded; but nothing short of previous experience, in some plane or other, can account for it.

Thus, in Harmer John we have a Monumental of the opposite order from Brandon's monumentalism; a young man who transcends the heroic boundary by reason, living, of compulsive power, and, dead, of after-influence. His is the monumentality of Jesus Christ; because he once lived nothing can ever be quite the same again. In him we find the fusion of the Monumental and the Heroic characters—the former represented by his moral and spiritual altitude, his post-mortem survival, and the latter by

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his material warfare: the fusive element being victory, which binds the two and cements his literary status.

Neither, for obvious reasons, is the Monumental character bound to be angelic. It may just as easily be diabolical. Crispin just misses being a Monumental; he misses it through not being wholly credible, through the melodramatic setting his creator has chosen to give him, and, above all, through his final defeat. A Monumental cannot suffer defeat; Harmer John was not defeated when they stoned him to death, Brandon was not defeated at that final Chapter meeting, because in the depths of his humiliation his soul had found its way back to God.

The one quality which must be common to every variety of the Monumental is strategical importance. Remove him, and, as though an underpinning had been taken away, the whole structure must crumble. The main function of the Monumental is the function of Atlas—to support the world. This disqualifies a good many of the Walpole characters who, at a casual glance, would seem to fulfil the conditions of the estate. It disqualifies Henry Galleon, Sir Jeremy Trojan, Mr. Warlock and Lord John Beaminster. Although one is positive that in their own worlds—that is to say, in the world beyond the boundaries of Mr. Walpole's novels—these rank as Monumentals, they do not qualify in our present list. It is much to be hoped that, having given us his spiritual descendant in Hans Frost, Mr. Walpole does not consider that he has fulfilled his duty without giving us a "monumental" portrait of Henry Galleon.

It is easy, going upon these lines, to identify at a glance the Monumental in the works of other contemporary novelists. Soames Forsyte, *The Card*, Anastasia Rakonitz—such characters as these exert a compulsion over their contemporaries which is extended to the readers of the books in which they appear.

In order of their creation, here are the main Walpole Monumentals: the Duchess of Wrexhe, Old Mrs. Trenchard, Archdeacon Brandon, Harmer John, the Duke of Romney, Hans Frost, Rogue Herries, Judith Paris. They do not, you will observe, grow under every mulberry bush: the power to create

them cannot be always there ; neither, it goes without saying, do they fit into every kind of literary surrounding. Their natural air is a grave one, they move to a strain of Beethoven. *Wintersmoon* is one of Hugh Walpole's finest *adagio* movements.

In this novel he completes his sequence from Beaminster to Purefoy, via Trenchard; it is (in 1833) the last of his London novels, and its background is the tradition which he first exploited in *The Duchess of Wrexe*. Its forerunners are that novel, *The Green Mirror* and *The Young Enchanted* and although, from point of view of narrative, it is unnecessary for the reader to acquaint himself in advance with its forerunners, he must receive a more direct inkling of the author's motive if he strings them together in their proper order.

With his passion for gathering up loose ends—he must be the tidiest of all living authors—Hugh Walpole has picked up the threads of four books and woven them into this braid of post-war England. It is a novel of resurrection, for here we have Lord John Beaminster, Felix Brun, Mr. Zanti, young Tom Seddon, and ghosts of others, including the apparently indestructible Peter Westcott: and here, in full array, are Mr. Walpole's Young Ladies—his Not-Quite Heroines: no longer—let us risk the charge of ungallantry—quite so young as they were, but, perhaps on that very account, more sympathetic. Meeting them again, one can believe that these *have* been heroines. Or perhaps it is that, removed out of the spotlight which is reserved for the heroine, they gain some quality that one over-hastily—in one's disappointment—denied them on their previous appearances. The Rembrandt Rachel Seddon, the Sargent Katherine Mark, achieve an importance in the *Wintersmoon* gallery that seems out of proportion to the claims of the putative heroine, Janet Poole, for all her indubitable passion and her talisman of youth.

Janet Poole, with her *mariage de convenance* which turns so disconcertingly to a genuine affair of the heart: with her possessiveness, her introspection, her insatiable desire to have first claim upon those for whom she cares, her motherhood, her suffering and the indispensable adjunct of “ the other woman ”

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in her background has all the material for being a heroine in her hands. She is, in fact, the perfect synthetic heroine, in that the principal drama and emotion of the novel belong to her: yet, with her task made easy, she throws away her chances with speeches of which the following is a fair example:

“ ‘ There isn’t a motive, an impulse in me that isn’t suspect. If I love Humphrey, it’s my egotism; or Wildherne, and it’s my horrible sensual nature; or the Duke, and it’s my sentimentality; or Rosalind, and it’s my pride; or the Duchess, and it’s my conceit. Never mind—what’s the good ? But I see my little soul, Katherine, fluttering like a broken-winged, unfledged bird in a dark cellar full of broken glass and spiders. Dear me, yes. That’s picturesque, isn’t it ? But the point is, Katherine, that the worst item in my account is jealousy—wretched, mean, green-eyed jealousy.’ ”

Now, all that may be sincere; it is certain that Mr. Walpole intends us to take it for sincerity. But it is not convincing, because the meaning is conveyed to us in an idiom which is not the post-war idiom at all. Does anyone nowadays talk of either “ a horrible sensual nature ” or “ green-eyed jealousy ” ?

The trouble seems to be that Hugh Walpole has got the right set of ideas for the creation of the heroine, but that the ideas stop at ideas: they are altogether too theoretical. And in an emotional passage such as the above they invariably retreat into the osprey, the corset and train, the parasol and polka-dotted veil of the Edwardian era ; they become “ costume,” and their utmost frankness is discounted by some element for which one can find no other name but social consciousness. Now, social consciousness is an artificiality, and the heroic impulse, whether it be male or female in its expression, cannot survive the artificial.

The story, which is nominally that of a young couple who marry for expediency’s sake, and whose after-peace is ruined by the wife’s discovery of her passion for the husband who is, to her knowledge, devoted to another woman, is really the story of two old men: two old angels, watching over the destinies of the chil-

dren who are their breath of life. Parallel with the story of Janet Grandison, the traditionalist, who marries Wildherne Poole "to give her sister comfort," runs the story of Rosalind Grandison, who is love's anarchist, anarchist of tradition, who marries Tom Seddon and then runs away with a cad, leaving her husband to blow his brains out in consequence. This is a rich although not a new theme: it carries the modern hall-mark, and proceeds against a background similar to that which Hugh Walpole gave us in the *Duchess of Wrexhe*: a background of May-fair, of drawing-rooms, of clubs and of country mansions—tuned up to a post-war tempo and seldom failing to observe the beat. Where the beat fails is, paradoxically, not in the older characters, not in the Duke of Romney and Lord John Beaminster, who, to pursue the metaphor, fall naturally into half-time and easily maintain their places in the procession: but in the two Grandisons, who are consistently out of step: who belong neither, one feels, to the lovely leisured Duchess of Wrexhe period nor to the Age of Speed, but who insist upon following a measure which is common to neither of these two periods. For Rosalind, as we have already said elsewhere, is a pasteboard creation, a synthetic deceiver, with whom it is difficult to imagine that hardy sensualist Ravage eloping, and for whom it is even more difficult to imagine so excellent a person as Rachel's son Tom committing suicide.

For this reason the emotion of *Wintersmoon* concentrates less upon these erring young people—which is its natural focus—than upon the "two old angels"—upon the Duke of Romney, the Monumental, and upon Lord John Beaminster, who, through their love, carry the brunt of their beloveds' sufferings, in whom their joy and their pain is magnified by vicarious participation.

The difference between the two lies in a degree of spirituality. Lord John's horizon is bounded by the Beaminster tradition, by social observation, by material comforts, and by his love for young Tom Seddon, whereas the Duke has, in a sense, no horizon, at least no visible boundary: his adoration of Wildherne, his deep love for Janet, are part of his love of God.

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Kind, worldly, lovable and loving, with every virtue of his class and some of its petty vices, such as snobbery, moral cowardice when mental or physical ease is in question, Lord John is a *dépaycé* in the post-war world.

“He was old. He was tired. His day was over. His world was done. And the boy whom he loved more than himself was mortally unhappy.”

“An old man in a dry month.” He who would cut off his right hand to save his boy cannot, even for Tom’s sake, kindle the divine spark that illuminates the Duke’s relations with his son. His love is a tragedy; instead of a joy, it is a weight added to his declining years. He is an old man in prison, who lacks the light that would show him that the walls are but cobweb, the bars but withered reed. And he has lived so long in prison, so happily, so luxuriously, has so adapted himself to it that the will to escape is gone. Mr. Walpole’s Chief Character was very tender when He spared to this prisoner the knowledge of Tom’s ultimate tragedy.

How strong is the contrast between this figure of pathetic and thwarted love and the simple splendour of the Duke’s character, which lays the Midas-touch upon all others with which it comes in contact. His is the compulsive quality of the true Monumental; in him the negative good which is in Lord John becomes positive: it is the difference between doing no harm and doing good which lends the Duke his altitude, while moving him no whit farther from our hearts.

“Had he not come so late in life to the Dukedom, and had there been in him some element of ruthlessness or vanity or selfish ambition, he would have made more stir in the world. He had never figured in the public life of his country, he shrank from the personalities and the falsities of politics, he was still a child in his perception of modern moralities and standards (or absence of them), but he was not a child in his wide tolerance, his warm charity, his negation of self. He had lived always for those he loved—his wife, his child, his

tenantry, his servants, some friends. Above all for his religion, about which he rarely spoke and never argued. Unlike his wife he did not care of what sect anyone might be so that God was a reality; atheists, materialists, he did not understand, but was sure that one day they would find the way. In God's good time everyone would find the way. 'Not a sparrow . . . ' ”¹

In the same sense that Lord John Beaminster may be said to stand for the letter of Traditionalism, so the Duke stands for its finest spirit. Perhaps once or twice in a lifetime one may meet with such a being, and, for the moment, evil is not and the world is wholly good. This is a part of what I mean when, in the prefatory chapter to this book, I wrote that by reading Hugh Walpole's novels one has a very fair chance of becoming something. His power to create such characters as the Duke of Romney and Harmer John, perpetual reminders of a Good that is, but which seems sometimes very far away, constitutes an important element in his hold on the British public; for he gives us this Good in a guise by no means fantastical, but in a form of which any man's mind may hold at least a single example, and of which he is the better for being reminded.

By a happy turn of language, Hugh Walpole thus describes the Duke's first meeting with his daughter-in-law to be:

“So now he came to her and caught her into his arms and kissed her.”

That “caught her into his arms”—which might so readily, in the case of a less perceptive writer, have been “took her in his arms”—is the key-note of his virility and tenderness: we know in a word that we have not to deal with sanctified ashes, our hearts quicken a beat.

His influence upon those whom he loves is both conscious and unconscious; when Wildherne, in the throes of his miserable *affaire* with Diana Guard (of which, at that time, the Duke is ignorant), comes up to town with the intention of going to her,

¹ *Wintersmoon*.

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he finds himself dining and wining with his father; their evening is spent at the theatre, his night in his father's dressing-room—weary, but happy and secure. Janet, in her selfish absorption, flings out the ugly truth about the conditions of her marriage to Wildherne, little caring how it will wound the father who adores him, and, instead of reproach, there is love, always there is love, for these two lost ones. Wounded in his love and in his pride:

“His arms closed tightly about Janet as though he would defend her against all the ghosts of evil and the deadly powers of the obscene world.”¹

Nor is he always tender; he can be very downright.

“The Duke got up and stood, his legs spread, in front of the fire. ‘You’re not very intelligent or perceptive, are you, Wildherne?’

“Wildherne was furious.

“‘I’m damned if I know what you mean, sir.’

“‘No, and you don’t know what a woman means, either. I know why you’re going down. To coddle that boy of yours. If you thought of that wife of yours a little more, and that boy of yours a little less, it would do no harm.’

“‘Thank you,’ Wildherne answered. ‘When I want your advice, father, I’ll ask for it.’”²

The honest and splendid scene between Wildherne and his father which follows, chronologically, this outburst, in which the Duke brings Wildherne to recognition of his selfishness, shows up their relationship at its strongest and best: the ideal father-son relationship, in which all bonds of family and home are tightened, a more exquisite, because rarer, thing than the mother-son relationship, implying as it does complete knowledge, a unity of thought and formula in which to express thought that can never be totally unanimous when it is translated through the medium of opposing sexes.

The book fulfils the romantic tradition in having a happy ending; through the Duke’s instrumentality Wildherne and

¹ *Wintersmoon*.

² *Ibid*.

Janet have made their peace, but tragedy had to enter their lives before the balance between Janet's wild love and Wildherne's dispassion is adjusted. Happiness, when it comes, comes in a frail, perilous guise, an apple-blossom beauty that makes one hold one's breath, in fear lest a petal should fall. Yet one is persuaded that, in the case of the two young Pooles, the fruit-time will hold ample compensation for the vanished loveliness of Spring. Rosalind is left to work out her own dark destiny with Charles Ravage, and for the Duke—"God's cheery face appeared over the mountain's brow." Mark how that last chapter is staged at Watendlath; it is an omen.

One cannot leave *Wintersmoon* without mention of the *Golden Scarecrow*, which throws its dancing shadow across its pages. This is the solitary example in Hugh's Walpole's pre-Herries writing of his introduction of a child-character—practically a baby-character—into a setting of the Adult World. As an experiment it is a complete success. The small Humphrey establishes his importance without any sense of strain or effort upon the lives of those nearest to him. His small person crystallises Wildherne's desire for a son, his passionate paternity, and Janet's possessiveness, her jealousy of the influence which has slipped into and widened the gulf between her and Wildherne. But apart from these reflexes of adult emotion with which he is intimately concerned, Humphrey achieves a very definite personality of his own, and the dignity of a chapter to himself—a chapter in the *Golden Scarecrow* vein, which proves that Hugh Walpole has still the freedom of the Little world. It is a lovely chapter, this chapter of a second birthday: full of the dim, half-earthly, half-heavenly bliss of two years old. Once again Humphrey is to have the dignity of a chapter to himself: here it is, complete:

"CHAPTER VIII

"A PUFF OF WIND

"Young Humphrey died at ten minutes past four this Eleventh of April——.

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"Mrs. Beddoes spoke the right word to Hawes:

" 'Barring my sister-in-law's youngest, 'e was the jolliest kid I ever did see.'"

"END OF PART THREE."¹

It is a magnificent book, high in the list of the "great" Walpole novels. It owes much of its magnificence to the presence of Mr. Walpole's Chief Character, never quite within sight, yet never to be forgotten: using now one and now another for its mouthpiece—the Duke, Katherine Mark, Zanti the antique dealer: ready for Lord John, and Tom, and little Humphrey, when the time comes for their last exits.

From the stately formalism of *Wintersmoon* to the informalism of *Hans Frost* is a far cry. It is the step from a world whose every thought and action are governed by ancient tradition to a world whose tradition is ever fluid, ever in the making; from a world of patronage to a world of people dependent on patronage.

Hans Frost is as romantical a book in its way as *Maradick*, as *Above the Dark Circus*; exactly twenty years after the publication of his first novel, Hugh Walpole raises the corner of a curtain to show us his Faerie, unconquered and undiminished: his miniscular and infinitely populated world, weaving busily just beyond the boundary of mortal sight and sound, unless eyes and ears happen to be anointed with the magic juice.

But the romance of *Hans Frost*, conceived in the illusive glow of Indian summer, is of a finer, more remote and distant quality than that which its creator has previously given us.

Let us amuse ourselves for a moment by regarding it as a fairy-tale, *tout simple*. Here are the familiar ingredients: the Good King, the False Queen, the Good Fairy, the Wicked Witch. The False Queen, with the connivance of the Witch, puts a spell upon the King to bring him completely under her power; their evil is defeated by the intervention of the Good Fairy, who, conjuring into thin air all bolts and barriers at a

¹ *Wintersmoon*.

touch of her enchanted wand, makes clear the way for the King to pass out in triumph: and so the spell is broken and They All Live Happily Ever After.

The novel opens, as so many of Mr. Walpole's novels open, upon a high note of emotion; the reader is instantly plunged into excitement with the announcement of Hans Frost's seventieth birthday. A seventieth birthday is not, in the lives of ordinary people, a particularly dramatic occasion; but in the case of a King it may be portentous. Hans Frost is the King of our fairy-tale; he is a famous novelist and poet, we have already studied the list of his works. He is an epic figure in English letters; he stands for the romance of success, from both a literary and a worldly point of view. And on his seventieth birthday he makes the discovery—infinately disquieting, not only to himself, but to his household—that he is being strangled by fame, asphyxiated by the treatment meted out to him by his wife—who is, of course, our False Queen.

One knows these wives of celebrities, their curious and pathetic ways of interpreting their duties, the dual motive that conceals itself behind their sacrifices, their play-acting, their stubborn maintenance of the temple veil which it is their pride to hang between the sanctuary of the outer world. There are some who realise that the spiritual life, the genius, or what you will, of the creative artist is quickened by contacts with this outer world: but the majority seize upon genius as the pretext for the satisfaction of their protective lust, they are jealous too lest one ray of the divine sunlight should escape themselves, or those whom they have chosen for its reception.

Ruth Frost is the celebrity's wife *in excelsis*: beautiful and stately, perfectly persuaded of her own indispensability, snobbish and insincere, insatiable in her own demands upon the worshippers of her husband; incapable of understanding for one moment the thing to which she pays tribute. Without personal belief in Hans' genius, she is opportunist enough to recognise the importance and value to herself of the world's estimation of him, and to turn it to the fullest account. Hugh Walpole has

never done a crueller or more authentic portrait of a woman; for the sake of his study of Ruth one can overlook a mother-in-law so sinister that she is almost the mother-in-law bogy of the music halls. Ma Marriott is our Witch, only, instead of occupying a cobweb-hung garret of the King's palace, she inhabits a grim Victorian parlour hung with photogravures of Mr. Gladstone and Waterloo; instead of a cauldron her diabolical weapon is a tea-pot. With two such millstones about his neck one would say a man were overladen, unless he were superman: and this Hans Frost, our King, our Monumental, very nearly succeeds in being.

Into this *ménage*, then, enters, tearfully, our Good Fairy: totally unconscious of her mission: full of awe, diffidence and timorous love: Nathalie Swan, the orphaned niece of the False Queen, who has chosen, in a moment of queenship, to spirit her up to town from her Polchester eyrie: a doubtful experiment, but Queens must have their follies. Nathalie is nineteen; perhaps the drawing shows her a little too childish for a post-war nineteen, a little too deeply imbued with qualities that modernity and a High School education are supposed to have knocked out of the modern young. It does not matter; her Good Fairyhood is not affected, and since this is her *métier* in the novel one has no quarrel with her creator. If Nathalie herself grows indistinct as the book proceeds, her purpose is never so. She is a powerful although wholly unconscious influence; she is herself, and she is Hans Frost's projected thought of her; she is, therefore, very nearly a supernatural figure. There is something elusive, something will-o'-the-wispish about her which redeems her from that nice, well-governessed rank of English girls who have so far filled (according to their lights) the position of heroine in the novels. She is, therefore, although frail as thistledown, of importance, not merely as a character, but as a creation.

The thrill of the book—and to me it is one of the most thrilling of Hugh Walpole's novels—lies in the extraordinary romantic triumph of its author in the exquisite tact and delicacy with which he has handled a perilous situation.

The strange love of Hans Frost for his niece Nathalie Swan

is something altogether new and most delightfully dangerous. Scylla on one hand, Charybdis on the other, threaten the frail romantic craft; reefs lie blackly beneath swift-running waters. It is precisely such a passage as the Romantic enjoys: he glories in difficulties of navigation. And where the Realist goes crashing on the rocks, or whirls down into Avernus, the Romantic skims the rapids and presently glides forth upon a glassy sea.

Not that our Romantic begs the question. He leaves us no room for doubt that it is love, in the fullest sense of the word, that Hans Frost feels for Nathalie; he takes pains to show us, beyond possibility of misunderstanding, that Hans Frost is not in his dotage, that his feelings are no sentimental tribute of age to youth. He presents his hero, his Monumental, to us in the clearest terms of mental and physical vigour, and in a grand mood of rebellion. The King is aware of the evil spell, but needs another enchantment to set against it.

Here is the beginning of our situation: the element which lifts the novel out of the familiar ruck of novels about literary or artistic heroes who, married to *bourgeois* though well-intentioned wives, have their moment of rebellion—with varying results. But whereas in the majority of cases these rebellious heroes seek, as their means of levitation from the commonplace, some heroine of their own calibre, Hugh Walpole's hero, removed by age from the more obvious solution, finds his ideal not *in* but *through* the youthfulness and simplicity of Nathalie. From the moment of their encounter the tempo of his spiritual life quickens; the full nobility of his character—a little smothered by the circumstances of his life with Ruth—asserts itself. He loves her with a splendour of loving, capable of profound self-immolation; he loves her bravely, shirking no implication or unpleasantness that the act of loving her may bring upon him. And the benediction upon this beautiful experience comes in the form of the One-Eyed Commander, the slowly materialising ghost of the book which we know is going to be the jewel in his crown.

Their meeting is a meeting of sensitives; with one hand she

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holds open the door through which he perceives his line of escape from a world of false values into his own kingdom of the soul, with the other, all unconsciously, she draws him after her. From unreality into reality: the counter-charm is complete. The divine recognition dawns between these two questing creatures, each gathers courage from the other for the quest.

“ ‘ I was dying, and a touch of your hand on my forehead saved me. Is that very sentimental ? Well, let it be. I don’t care a damn.’ ”¹

When Nathalie finds her young Russian and obeys Nature in falling in love with him, one might feel that she had exchanged gold, if not for dross, at least for alloy, were it not for the fact that, apart from the fulfilment of her artistic function in the life of our Monumental, her dramatic value is not overwhelming. Her *raison d’être* is to act as the saviour of the character to whom the book is dedicated, and when that object is accomplished she becomes evanescent. If it is she who called Hans Frost to life, it is he who keeps her alive, by his passionate pursuit of her when, her fairyhood failing her, she is driven from his house by Ruth’s malice and jealousy. She takes refuge in flight, and, in doing so, performs unawares her final act of service; for, in his will that nothing shall intervene between her and his strong protective love for her, he cuts the last threads that bind him to the old life of falsity, and, in a world swept clean, sits down to consummate his threatened kingship.

The ending is so lovely, so satisfying and peaceful that we do not pause to enquire whether it is not just too good to be true; whether it is wholly credible that a man of Frost’s age and habit of living should suddenly, at the bidding of a dream, relinquish home and wife and all the foolish and fatal influences to which he had so long resigned himself. It is just so that one would have one’s hero act, and that is enough.

It is one of the simplest and the most charming of Hugh Walpole’s novels; it ranks with *Prelude to Adventure* as one of

¹ *Hans Frost.*

the most romantic. As in *Prelude*, he is economical with his characters; as in *Maradick*, as in *Fortitude*, as in half a dozen others, he introduces his Gentle Fool, his Feste, to lighten with sweet philosophy the pilgrim's way. Mihail Klimov is the lineal descendant of Punch, of Zanti, of Andrey, of all simple idealists who pass through life as little children, under a special protection, a special care.

It is not fitting that we should close this chapter on the Monumentals without reference to the only one of their number whom we have not so far noticed. Old Mrs. Trenchard, the Matriarch, the Egoist of *The Green Mirror* and *The Young Enchanted* is one of those massive and wholly unlovable pieces of feminine sculpture in which Hugh Walpole excels.

'She is a middle-class Duchess of Wrexhe, treated, instead of romantically, in the most coldly realistic manner. There is no "wangling" about Mrs. Trenchard. She is a much more dangerous proposition than the Duchess, her cruelty is much more subtle, because it masks itself in kindness. She is the mother of *The Silver Cord*, a maternal vampire, gorging herself upon her children. The horror of old Mrs. Trenchard lies in the fact that she is not the lover, but the possessor, of her family. She has no emotion towards them save the emotion of domination. Her solitary instinct is to control their minds and bodies and souls. It is a type of character peculiarly tempting to the novelist: the conquering woman, who in her will to conquer forswears every sexual attribute. Hugh Walpole played with it in the Duchess of Wrexhe, he tackled it seriously in Mrs. Trenchard. "Intreeged" with it, he had another shot at it in Ruth Frost, decorating it, experimenting with it, to see of what it was capable; and all these creations were studies for his final great achievement, for Judith Paris, in whom he solved the problem of how far such a woman can be triumphant, how much she may possess of sex, of charm, and yet remain implacably herself.

The hideousness of Mrs. Trenchard's character comes out most strongly in her relationship with her daughter Katherine,

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in whom is focused her most ardent possessive instinct: young Henry's beloved sister Katherine, who is the first actively to rebel against the matriarchal rule. For so clever is Mrs. Trenchard in her wickedness that all her victims are content, and even unaware of their victimisation. In Katherine Mrs. Trenchard is up against a character as determined as her own, strengthened, moreover, by the love which is at the root of their disagreement. Unable to induce Katherine to give up her lover, the woman tries to ruin him spiritually, and when she is defeated by Katherine's elopement she hardens into iron against the daughter who has occupied the central position in her scheme of living.

The strangest and perhaps the most strangely lifelike element in this situation, is Katherine's perfectly genuine devotion to her mother. Theoretically it would seem impossible that such a nature as Mrs. Trenchard's could inspire love at all; yet in practice it will be found that these human vampires extract an extraordinary devotion from their victims. It is perhaps a little violent to speak of Mrs. Trenchard as a vampire; let us say that she has vampirical instincts, which are only held in check by her perfectly correct and conventional *tenue* as mistress of the household: a kind of vampire in curl-papers. Katherine's plea for forgiveness, her mother's refusal to grant it—a refusal to be ratified later on her deathbed, when Katherine, flinging herself on her knees, looks in vain for a glimmer of mollification in the dying eyes—are most grimly realistic.

Like all good Romantics Hugh Walpole recognises the moment when sentiment becomes a falsity, and the desire at all costs for the sentimental ending must be relinquished in the cause of truth. It would have been easy, for a writer of less artistic probity, to have permitted at the last some gesture, some glance that would have set not only Katherine's but the reader's heart at rest. Bravely he drives the sword in farther; the gateway to Romance is Realism: we must pass through the Inferno to Paradise. By denying himself the cheap gratification of a death-bed reconciliation he proves the immortality of his Romanticism.

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IT is a vast room; so vast that its walls keep dissolving and re-forming themselves, ever more distantly and at strange angles, to accommodate the company that ebbs and flows within it like a restless tide: a telescopic room, that adapts itself, as the properly constituted room should do, to every demand made upon its resources. It is, in fact, a room of fantasy, a room in Cloud Cuckoo Land, such a room as could only exist in the element of No Time, where our disembodied selves are now wandering.

Before one joins that vast company, let us look at the room; it is worth it. It is a lovely place; strain our eyes as we may, we cannot be certain of its limits, we cannot accustom ourselves to its shifting geography. Just now the door was there, and now—where has it vanished? Ah, over yonder, where that piece of old silver tapestry comes sweeping down to the carpet—at least, where it came: for it, too, is gone, and there is distance only, and quietly moving heads. And I am sure, in that corner, where the crowd collects so densely, about some person of importance, a screen worked in gold thread was standing a moment ago; and now its place is filled by a magnificent secretaire, whose doors are panelled with red and white ivory! A room of odd and enchanting surprises, where a hundred and one incongruous objects are brought together, but magic lies on them, so that their incongruities are smoothed away, and they grow into the room and make part of its legend, so that one wonders what would happen if they were not there at all. Things shabby and things beautiful; how has that old green mirror with the star-shattered glass managed to keep its place next to a slim white Hermes with tiny winged feet?—and that harridan of a black-haired doll in a green dress—cheap relic of carnival—sitting

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upon an orange chair from Heal's: what is it doing in such surroundings?

And the odd, feverish confusion of the walls! But stay: is it confusion? Before one has time to take in the full horror of "Queen Victoria receiving the news of her Accession" or "Mr. Gladstone addressing the House of Commons" these, too, have faded away, and one finds oneself gazing with rapture's breath indrawn, at a little Manet: two ladies and gentlemen outside a print shop in Paris. One of the ladies wears a blue crinoline and the other a white; there is a little fuzzy white dog. And before one has had enough of the pearl-grey wall, the shining windows and the broken white and blue of the sky, it too has vanished, and one finds oneself peering into the darkness of a Sickert, to find a certain little pink shadow which one knows must be there.

Evidently the Owner of the Room is a lover of art, for here is a group of gentlemen gathered about a Solander case: murmured names reach the ear, with reverence in the inflections: Méryon, Callot, Bracquemond, Aldegrever; among these gentlemen, one with a head like a burning bush leads the conversation in a voice whose cadences fall like forgotten music through the hum of other voices.

One begins to think that one was mistaken about Mr. Gladstone, for now, as though one had shaken one of those childish kaleidoscopes which were among the delights of our nursery days, the walls are jewelled with paintings by Somov, Benois, Douboginky, Lanceray and Ostroynova, as though we have suddenly passed into a Russian atelier, with the artists' works all framed up, ready for exhibition!

Here are books, ancient and modern, in a sort of loving confusion; again, among the foreign authors, the Russian note persists in Brély, Gogol, Dostoievsky and Tchekov: Dowson and Donne take pride of place among English authors; *Clarissa*, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Monk*, not to mention three authors of whom the Owner of the Room seems particularly fond. Who is this Peter Westcott, with *Reuben Hallard*,

Mortimer Stant and *The Fiery Tree* to his credit? What is this fine collected edition by a writer calling himself Hans Frost, whose enchanting titles leap out in a fine thin lettering of gold to imprison our fancy? And who has heard of Henry Galleon, whose books are held in such high esteem by their owner that they are enshrined in a special little cabinet of their own: *The Three Magicians*, *Mrs. Whippet*, *Old Cain and Abel* and *The Slumber Family* prick us into a lively interest. It becomes imperative that one should at once learn more of these valued writers; one puts out a tentative hand to possess oneself of a volume, but shudders back, like a detected thief, at the scream of a purple macaw in a gilt cage, and hides one's confusion in examining the contents of a cabinet whose glass doors enclose such various treasure trove as a fine triptych in Limoges enamel, with deep burning blues and greens in it, and a little Japanese fisherman in coloured ivory.

And there is a carved red amber dragon, mounted on a chunk of amber shaped square, like a little block of wood, with the most lovely lights and colours, from the deepest Venetian red to the fairest honey-gold, trembling in it. And there is a large rose diamond fastened to a bodkin, and a sixteenth-century cameo portrait of Lucius Verius cut in a dark onyx, the enamel green with little white peas and small diamonds set in each pod, and all manner of outlandish odds and ends of jewelry.

And other cabinets are sprinkled with the queerest collection of little old shabby oddments, family pictures and boxes with shells on them and baby toys and photographs of an ugliness so tender that one cannot despise or smile at them.

It is easy to see that one could spend one's whole time in examining the room, where the guests move softly across rugs of a deep peach-colour, under the inverted fountains of the elaborate old glass candelabra, whence the soft light of antiquity streams down upon the company.

And what a company!

There may be little brilliance here, but there is much magnificence; not the magnificence that depends on outward

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trapping, but the magnificence of tradition, which has for its motive force the deeds and sayings and opinions of generations who have lived grandly in times past. At first the atmosphere seems a little oppressive; but it is very, very calm; and presently one loses the sense of oppression and surrenders to the calmness. It is a calmness which draws its inspiration from the roots of the past.

One is struck with the fact that all these people—or the majority of them—have a sense of direction, deriving from the legend that has called them into being. There is something restful in their company, as there must always be in the company of people of good breeding who, whatever private worries and passions, lusts and distresses may agitate them inwardly, will never force their personal emotions on a social gathering, nor, indeed, on individuals, unless these be their most intimate friends.

It is, on the whole, an elderly company, of people who, by virtue either of birth or of personal effort, have made a niche for themselves in the world. There are a few young people, but they are in the minority. Here, for instance, is quite a gay group, among whom we recognise with a thrill of previous acquaintance, young Lady St. Leath with her brother Falk; young Henry Trenchard, slightly owl-like behind his pince-nez, but quietly funny, all the same, as the laughter of his sister Millie testifies. Here is one figure of an artificial and meretricious charm, who wanders from group to group in search of that which she has given up hope of finding, leaving behind her a glitter and an echo of mocking laughter: Rosalind Seddon, who was Rosalind Grandison: pursued wherever she goes by a pair of inimical eyes that watch her and will her to do her worst, the eyes of one who sees in her the vehicle for the destruction of one even worse hated than she.

But for the most part it is a serious gathering, of Beaminsters and Purefoys and Trenchards, all conscious of their destinies: with a leavening of ecclesiastical figures, among whom stands out the commanding figure of Archdeacon Brandon, who,

however, takes pains to keep the width of the room between him and his colleague Canon Ronder; Ronder has an unfortunate effect on Brandon's periods: phrases that seemed to be conceived in his most felicitous vein have a way of losing their balance under the mild, benignant gleam of Ronder's eye.

Here they stand in a genial group, three fine old men, Lord John Beaminster, Sir Charles Duncombe and the Duke of Romney—himself like a grand old admiral—round the chair of a man yet older; Sir Jeremy Trojan, whose memories extended to the years before these others had filled the Duncombe, or Beaminster, or Purefoy cradles. Here you may get the full bouquet of the pre-war manner, with its leisured courtesies and its sense of security. Around the group flourishes Mr. Absalom Jay, intent, like his namesake, on picking up crumbs that furnish him with the means of living. The feminine counterpart of this group centres around a figure seated by the fire with knitting in its hand: we do not need the turban of grey hair to inform us that this is the Duchess of Romney, with her attendant graces: Janet Poole (her husband, Wildherne, stands a little apart, modestly wondering whether he should join his father, in the group about Sir Jeremy Trojan, or if he will be looked upon as a confounded nuisance if he throws in his lot with those writer fellows, with whom, contrary to Purefoy tradition, he feels an unaccountable sympathy), Katherine Mark, who was Katherine Trenchard (her husband, Philip, is in the group Wildherne Poole is eyeing), Rachel Seddon, in every fibre of her being conscious of the bright progress of the girl she detests, and a few minor individuals are all pretending, for their various reasons, to be interested in the Duchess's charities, but mainly because they love her and wish to please her and make her happy.

The conversation rises almost to a roar in one corner of the room, where a group of writers, led by Peter Westcott, are arguing over the merits of Henry Galleon. Hans Frost sits in the chair which his age and dignity allow to him, nodding his head, and wondering whether, in a few years' time, there will be

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young men to argue as passionately over him as these are arguing over Henry Galleon; and young Henry Trenchard raises his head and directs a glittering glance across the room, longing to join them, but prevented by his diffidence from thrusting himself into such august company; for when one has no more than a single book to one's credit (and of that not more than a third of the people in the room have heard) one dare not claim kinship with the great. He watches with envious eyes the hasty progress of Henry Bohun across the room; he shows no such diffidence. But then there was no end of a fuss made about his book *Discipline* when it was published, and though, since he was in Russia, it is said that Bohun does not think much of this early effort, nevertheless it is evident that he feels he *knows*, and has a right to take his place among the rest of the *cognoscenti*.

And there are vast crowds of less distinguishable people roaming about among these more or less settled groups, old ladies and old gentlemen, with a few rather Cambridge-ish young men, who seem a little like fish out of water in the gathering; there is Olva Dune, and a rather too smart individual of the ornamental name of Cardillac, who, if one observes him, will be seen to keep well away from whatever portion of the room shelters Peter Westcott; not from fear, indeed, but from an innate conception of the suitabilities of things, which are as much a part of his upbringing as they are of the upbringings of the group beside the fire. Cathedral ladies, vague and a little fluttered, to be in such august company, huddling together as though for protection against such people as Lady Bell-Hall and the Dowager Lady St. Leath. A number of minor clergy, very anxious and affable, very assiduous in handing round the saffron cake and getting in the way of the servants. Felix Brun, waiting to detach Rachel Seddon from the charitable symposium, and a couple of young, dark, angry-looking people who stand together and have little to say to the rest of the company—the Warlocks, she with her cropped hair that seems symbolical of her spiritual remoteness from all these conventional people defying them quietly, and he

poking his honey-coloured beard across her shoulder with murder in his eyes.

But everyone, whether inside the room or out, is conscious all the while of a single figure, which, indeed, makes no sign to compel their attention: yet ever and anon there falls a silence and heads are turned involuntarily in its direction, as if, from that source must come the next clue to their actions. In that figure is centred the whole life of the room; each one feels it—some with resentment, some with half-humorous acknowledgment and some with a sense of hopelessness. For each one knows that it is because of this figure's being what it is that they are what they are; that the thread of their lives and destinies, no matter how it may be twisted, leads back unerringly to this one control. We see Lord John and Lady Adela Beaminster wryly acknowledging it, we see Rachel Seddon resenting it with her whole soul, we see people like Rosalind Seddon and her lover mocking at it and pretending it is not there. Ecclesiastical England bows towards it with reverence, and gets flouted for its pains. The younger Trenchards regard it with wide-open, slightly awe-struck eyes, not fully understanding what it is about, nor what it has to do with them, while the elder Trenchards bend their stiff backs as they have never bent them to other idols. We see Purefoys and Duncombes acknowledging it proudly, as the highest expression of the order they belong to, and people like Absalom Jay and Felix Brun in a very ecstasy of delight and veneration. We see the Cambridge young men a little uneasy, conscious of themselves, terrified that they may not do the right thing, and the authors and artists gravely respectful to a spirit which has despised them, yet upon whose well-being no small part of their prosperity depends.

Such a small figure to stand for so much! It sits bunched together in an arm-chair, a high, carved chair: its dry wrinkled hands are clasped upon the handle of a black ebony cane; it seems to be carved there, stone, marble, anything lifeless, except for the eyes, the tense clutch of the fingers about the cane, and the dull but brooding gleam that a large jade pendant, the only

colour against the black of her dress, flings at the observer. The mouth is a thin, hard line, the nose small but sharp, the colour so white that it seems to cut into the background, and the skin drawn so tightly over the bones that a breath, a sigh, might snap it. It is the Duchess of Wrexhe.

Fearful and bitter old woman to have the control of so many destinies. But it is not she that controls them; she is the mere outward (and I grant you) awful symbol of the force behind, the force of Tradition. It is as though one were to meet Tradition face to face, and find it—a death's-head. Does God discover Himself so easily? No; one has to travel on and on, behind the Duchess of Wrexhe, to reach Primal Cause, and, for the majority, the Duchess is enough.

Felix Brun attempts—and fails—to summarise her: but he says one thing that is worth repeating.

“You can't be a realist only, if you're to do the Duchess properly. There's more than that wanted.”

Only Rosalind Seddon ventures to toss at her a contemptuous glance, in the course of her comings and goings.

“Hateful old woman! She doesn't matter—she'll soon be gone, anyway.” Ay—but what will she leave behind? Even Rosalind feels that creeping of the flesh that is said to give us warning that someone is walking over our future graves, as though some sub-conscious knowledge reaches her that she, even she, so young and gay, is but another pawn in that withered hand: the pawn with which the Duchess of Wrexhe is finally to beat the granddaughter she hates.

And the people come and go about that high carved chair, and a few, the most privileged, stop to address a few words to its still occupant; but the majority hurry past, as though a cold wind swept them, only pausing so briefly that it almost seems that the pause and the suggested movement that accompanies it are together some sort of an optical illusion that afflicts the eye of the onlooker with the strange impression that each has genuflected, oh so slightly, but unmistakably, before that mighty throne. What superstition! What an incredible atti-

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tude of mind to-day, when every two-legged creature stands up as God meant him to, and says he is as good as the next man!

And just when the room is at its quietest, and all minds seem turned towards the Duchess, Millie Westcott, who has been standing by the window, peering down into the darkling street, forgets the hush, and the presence of the Duchess and of all her elderly and reverend relatives, and calls out:

"There are some perfectly extraordinary people coming, Katherine! I can't see who they are—they seem to be in fancy dress! They're coming up! Hignett has let them in!"

And all of a sudden confusion seizes the room, as a monstrous clamour sounds upon the stairs: and all those pale faces at the door vanish as if into air, and lights shoot up to the ceiling, and a high wind bellies the tapestries, and with a faint protestant shriek Beaminsters and Trenchards and Purefoys are dissolving—one can see through them—they are thin like cobweb—the wind tears them into shreds and they are blown about the room in thin flakes of mountain mist. And a white light of rain fills the room with its high, vaulted wooden ceiling and its smooth polished boards underfoot. And a cry goes up like the call of a silver trumpet:

"The Herries are here!"

The Herries—with a ringing of spurs, a rustling of fine taffety gowns, the scrape of metal embroideries against panelling and the tap of high-heeled shoes: the door is flung wide. . . .

CHAPTER TEN

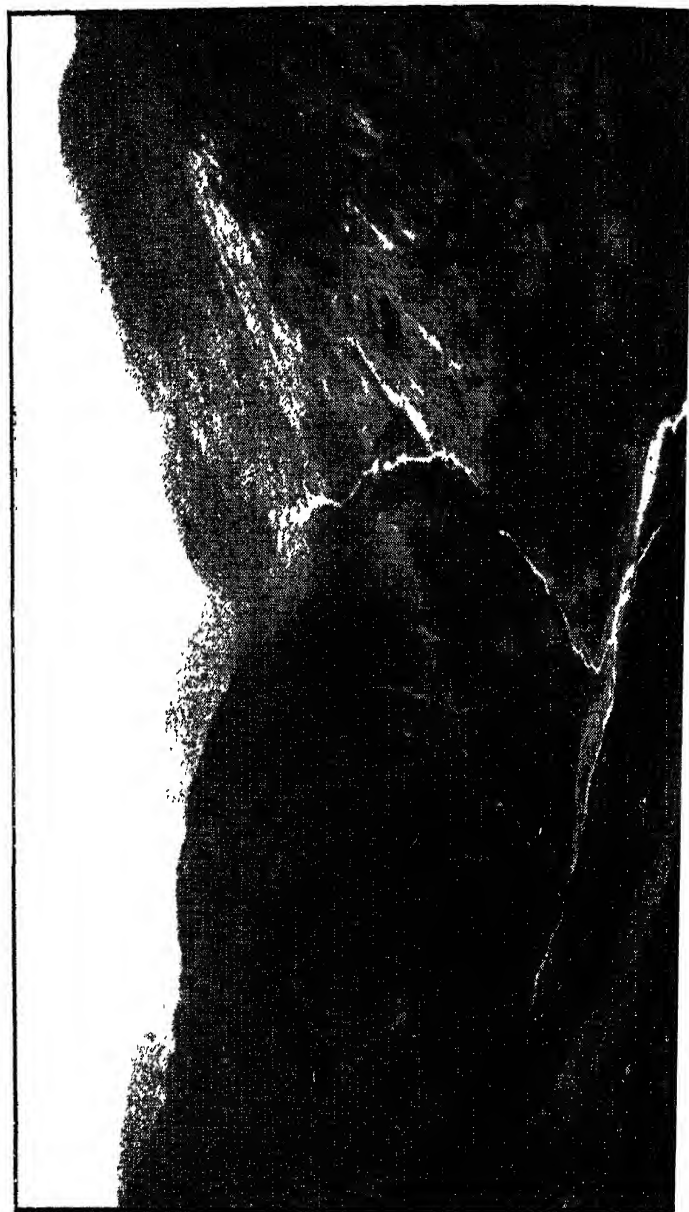
THE HERRIES SAGA

I

"I bid you mourn not for the death of beauty,
For, though the Springtide fades from Cumberland,
Her Streams and tarns, there is eternal spring
In heaven. And on my island where I live
I dream that heaven is very like this land,
Mountains and lakes and rivers undecaying,
And simple woodlands and wild cherry flowers.
At least I know no better. But weep not.
For though this land is but the shadow of heaven
It yet is heaven's shadow."—*Wise Kings of Borrowdale.*

is the valley of our hearts ; in every stream there are fish of gold,
the hills through the heather the blessed angels are picking the black
and singing under their wings as the rabbits run from their holes to
them."—*Rogue Herries.*

as this land—where tradition, not content with blowing
the mountain-sides in mists and trails of beauty, has struck
to earth: has solidified in loam and shale and strange
relics of one-time humanity: this land with its so secret
holy charm—that gave Hugh Walpole his *Herries Saga*.
There is no land that can compare with it, unless it should
lost land of Lyonesse over which now float the cormor-
But here in Cumberland is a harsher magic, a more
us, frightening, yet irresistible occultism, a stirring
earth of all those Men under Skiddaw whose blood has
and Cumbrian soil down the long centuries.
, layer under layer, one may pick up relics of the past—
l stirrup, a two-pronged fork, a buckle, bear witness to
; frail fragments of a human skull, a wild boar's tusk,



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and coloured shards iridescent with their glazing carry us back even farther. A chance kick at a tussock may bring Roman coins, pock-marked with corruption, rolling to our feet; a very little excavation may lay bare a settlement. But there are reaches among the mountains where, if one were to dig for ever, no trace of human habitation would yield itself to the questing spade. This is the virgin soil, the land of wild beasts whose carcasses have fertilised it, now known, perchance, to a vagrant Herdwick sheep, to an eagle: disturbed only with bird cry and with the echo of running water, impregnable, aloof from the frail human ants, who, clinging to Tophet Wall, dream they have conquered it. For it is, of course, the English Mecca of the rock-climber.

It is a strange land; it has the power either to reduce a man to his lowest denominator or to exalt him to more than himself; it can brutalise him or place him among the angels.

For centuries civilisation fought shy of it; even in these days its towns and villages hold more than a trace of barbarism; their surface adaptations are mere ironic concession to the demands of the tourists. It pays the Cumbrian to yield in externals to the vast, gold-bringing hoards who, at certain seasons of the year, invade his sacred by-ways, and spread their plague of urban influence over the countryside. But your true Cumbrian is immune from such infection. He knows exactly where to cry "Halt!" to the southern invasion. He flicks it from him as a draught flicks soot-flakes from a grate. In his spirit he is as wild and primitive, as wary, watchful and shy as were his ancestors in the days when Francis Herries took possession of his house in Borrowdale.

When the last leaf has fallen, when the Derwent churns itself into dark green jade under the little, cat-backed bridges, when Lodore, no longer the pitiful trickle which the summer tourist knows, hurls its chunks of solid ivory from top to bottom of its narrow cleft between the rocks, when Derwentwater and Bassenthwaite join, when the rain blows in thin, icy wire-drawn sheets, parallel with the ground, when one can stand under Castle Crag and not see it for the foaming mist that pours upon Rothwaite across Glaramara's shoulder, when Skiddaw and

Blencathra are non-existent, save in the memories of those who have known them, when all air and earth are a thunder of wind and water—then the Lakeland dweller comes into his own. It is the very truth that no man who has not known it in the harsh months from January to March knows Cumberland.

To this bewitched country, then, came Hugh Walpole, from his Faerie of Cornwall. His coming gives one no cause for surprise; how should he, an avowed Romantic, neglect so richly promising a soil?—a soil, moreover, which, from point of view of literature, had not been largely exploited. When I say largely exploited, I mean that it had not achieved any sort of literary fame through the hands of those who had written about it. This obscurity suited the Lakelanders: had he not, by undivulged means, succeeded in keeping the very name of his country out of Domesday Book? Notoriety made no appeal to him, fame hardly more. He mistrusted both: mistrust was bred in him, as presently I shall hope to prove.

The legend of the Lakeland poets hung dustily about Grasmere and Keswick; but the modern valuation of the Lakeland poets was tritely summed up for the present writer by a Bright Young Person who murmured, on Wordsworth's name being mentioned, "Lakeland poets; gloomy old men who sat under umbrellas making up poems about graveyards." It seems sad to think that Hugh I'A. Fausset's book, *The Lost Leader*, is never likely to come in the way of such a one.

Nevertheless, W. G. Collingwood was still living when Hugh Walpole came to Borrowdale; his *Thorstein of the Mere* was ancient history (published 1895), and his exquisite story of the Coniston lead mines, *Dutch Agnes, Her Valentine*, in spite of its reissue by Heinemann (it was originally published by Titus Wilson, of Kendal), had barely reached the outer world. Miss Constance Holmes had written beautifully of that part of Lakeland that lies about Morecambe Bay, its southern boundary: but until the inclusion of two of her novels in the World's Classics her fame could not be said to be more than local. Constance Holmes is the Mary Webb of the North, and Mary

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Webb's fame, it will be remembered, was post-mortem. It is comforting to know that the publishers of this book have taken steps to insure against a similar fate for Constance Holmes. Perhaps the only "great" and generally known novel of the Lakes is Mrs. Humphry Ward's *Helbeck of Bannisdale*.¹

I am not sure that the relative obscurity of any of the Lakeland writers was a trouble to them. In the shadow of the mountains one is apt to feel that it is the achievement that matters, and public approbation dwarfs itself before one's personal sense of having done well or ill. This is not a point of view, however, which makes for literary or any other kind of ambition, and I have an impression that it is exclusively northern. I am positive that it never presented itself to Hugh Walpole.

It was not strange that he should come; but was it not a little strange that he should remain, should take up his habitation in our midst, and come to regard as "home" in the dearest and closest sense the cottage under Catbells, which, later, he was to present with so generous a gesture to Adam Paris? Not strange at all; for North turns to North. Have we forgotten that northern strain that comes to Hugh Walpole through his maternal ancestors, the Forsters of Northumberland? That single drop of northern blood might have sent him stravaging over half the earth, in search of he knew not what, had he not had the wisdom to yield to impulse and root himself here. Now at last he could say, "Not a corpuscle in all my blood but in its appointed place doth quiet go." By coming north he had fulfilled himself, had paid tribute to that imperious "corpuscle," and, in due time, reaped his reward. It is the pride of Cumbria to reward those who approach it in the right spirit, as it is its pride to ignore the frivolous, the impertinent, and the trivial enquirer.

Now, what, exactly, did Hugh Walpole bring, apart from his talisman of northern blood, to his conquest of the Lakes?

He brought, in the first place, his assured position as a

¹ In the above paragraph I have confined myself to the Lakeland novelists: it is for this reason that I have omitted the name of one of our most distinguished writers, Nicholas Size.

novelist of the first rank: in the opinion of many, at the head of the first rank. In the opinion of the present writer it was Cumberland that gave him his overlordship with *Rogue Herries*—a position which he was to consolidate with each succeeding volume of the Herries Saga. He brought his youth—he was still in the early forties—and a mind burnished by intellectual and emotional experience to reflect every impression that the new environment afforded. He brought a spiritual sensitiveness amounting to occultism, of which, unfortunately, it is hardly permissible to give example here.

He brought, moreover, an enormous zest for writing, which was quickened into spate by his enthusiasm for the land, the people and their way of living. For the benefit of those people who, when a person is famous and successful and optimistic about himself, take pleasure in malicious commentary, it is as well to add that his enthusiasm was absolutely true, sincere and untainted by literary expediency.

He had none of the wrong sort of conceit; if he had had, things would have gone ill with him. It is difficult to be pontifical under the shadow of Skiddaw. On the other hand, the North respects a man who respects himself, who has a just pride in and valuation of his own work. It despises grovellers and the falsely humble, whom it has a disconcerting trick of accepting at their own (overt) valuation.

He brought, unimpaired, those virtues which had been his from the penning of the first chapter of *The Wooden Horse*: his almost childlike insistence upon good, his sympathy with all mankind, his conviction of the abiding power of beauty and of the fact that every human soul is struggling towards God.

And he brought some mossy little faults which, as we shall see, he was speedily to scrape off against Cumbrian boulders. The worst reproaches which had been levelled at him up to the present had been that he was often “cosy,” sometimes voluble and almost invariably domestic: that he had never treated the subject of sex in any honest and straightforward fashion, and that he had contributed nothing new to the novel form.

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Now in the Herries Saga we are going to see him triumphing over each of these reproaches, save the last. He is going to deal no longer with people leading conventional lives, he is going to handle sex with the security of a master, he is going to shake his fist in the faces of all those smug admirers who so far have bought dear Mr. Walpole's novels because there is never anything unpleasant in them (this class of reader is incapable of seeing the "unpleasantness" of *The Old Ladies*, and has probably been warned not to read *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair* because it is "rather gruesome"). He is deserting his aristocratic drawing-rooms, his cathedral closes, his Cornish inns; his face is towards the mountains, in his ears screams the helin-wind. He is in for an adventure more perilous than any he has previously undertaken. And this land, so jealous of its secrets, so rooted in its outlawry, is getting ready to offer him that spiritual hospitality which means so much more than mere hospitality of the roof-tree can bestow.

This meant an enormous thing to so receptive a nature as Hugh Walpole's. Habitually going through life with his hands held out in welcome to all and sundry, a snub might have been fatal. And how the mountains can snub one! How unmistakable they can make their intent not to be intruded upon, how they can close in on themselves, so that they become mere inarticulate rock hummocks and shaly slides! How in another mood, they can reveal themselves, can sigh, can stir, can give irrefragable proof of their godhead.

It was undoubtedly Hugh Walpole's essential simplicity that was his salvation here. A touch of "attitude," a suggestion of intellectual superiority, and the link of connection would have broken, never to be forged again.

Neither did he, so to speak, slap the mountains on the back, and try to force acquaintance in the way of all others most distasteful to the Cumbrian. I am quite certain it never occurred to him that, in order to know the district, it was necessary to suspend oneself on seventy feet of rope on the face of some "B" buttress or "C" traverse; he did not feel that it would be "in

the picture " to subscribe to the Blencathra, or wander round being hearty with local innkeepers.

He did not, in fact, consider that it was his business in any way to impose himself upon the scenery; he simply and modestly took possession of his cottage, sheltered by the larchwoods of Manesty, and settled down to create, in its small setting, a *milieu* for himself. He walked, but in no spectacular fashion; he did not parade his growing familiarity with the countryside, or claim privileges which he had not earned. He acted, in fact, not in the least like a famous novelist whose presence confers a *cachet* on his surroundings, who expects the very trees and stones to be *en fête* at his coming, but like a polite and well-bred guest, who, staying in a house for the first time, realises that if he behaves himself, he will be made free of all the little passwords and family jokes which mark the stranger from the intimate friend.

And that, if one may say so, is the spirit in which to approach the Lake District. It is jealous of its dignity, the dignity for which, in the time of the Norman Conquest, its rulers paid in blood and tears. It has as little use for the curious and familiar visitor as it has for the motorist who violates its highways with the stench of petrol. Its interest in such people is purely financial; to them its heart is a thrice-bolted door, for they lack both the tact and the good breeding to observe the formalities which every host appreciates from his guests.

In these conditions, therefore, the Herries Saga was incubated, and hatched itself, to pursue the simile, in March of the year 1930.

The geographical *milieu* of the Herries books lies within a ten-mile radius of Keswick. The circle swings out, loops Carlisle and Cockermouth, even Paris and London, but narrows again and again to this small circumference in which is concentrated the full dynamic force of the Herries passion, their intrinsic Herries-ness. Apart from the clear and convenient domiciliary motive—living within a cuckoo-call, what should be more natural than that Hugh Walpole should house his characters in the Borrowdale valley?—what force projected their forms upon the surrounding landscape?

The "one clear call" is in the valley of Borrowdale itself, into which you must pass, as Herries did upon that first starry ride, with little David clasped on his saddle-bow and a song on his lips:

—"through a gateway of high rock into a little valley, still as a man's hand and bleached under the moon, but guarded by a ring of mountains that seemed to David gigantic. The moonlight made them larger and marked the shadows and lines of rock like bands of jagged iron. . . . After a while one mountain detached himself from the skies, coming towards them—large, sprawling, very dark and solid, with a ragged edge. To the left of this mountain there was a straight thin ledge like a tight-rope, and on the right a very beautiful cluster of hills, in shape like the grouped petals of an opening flower."

Come for yourself to this little valley, with the lake on your right, and the formidable crags, tapestried with ivy, from which the rocks detach themselves like blown black rags on a windy sky, on your left; bring, if you have the mind, the large-scale plan published by Chaplin of Keswick: "Here," you may read on the map, "Rogue Herries met a child and fought a duel one Christmas night"—"Here Mrs. Wilson suffered the fate of a witch." Bring the plan, I say, if you are in a mood of identification. There is just the chance, however, that in the act of transforming romance into reality you may miss the very thing that you are seeking: the *why* and *wherefore* Hugh Walpole, with all Cumbria to select from, chose to locate his fictional drama here.

Unencumbered by diagram, freely surrendering yourself to the influences which encompass you with their host of unseen witness—is there not something forbidden, secret, tempting and dangerous in that first glimpse of Borrowdale, where the waters of Derwent narrow to a little ardent torrent under the shadow of the trees?—some hint of challenge, something to be conquered, something primitive and unconquerable and of pagan derivation that warns one to go warily?

If one visits Borrowdale in a decent fashion—and by decent I mean not scooping round the bends of the road in cars, not

making pedestrianism your object, not all agog and agape for geographical reassurance—Is that Glaramara?—is that the Gavel?—will that be Greenup Edge?—but leisurely, alert as a hare, and, like the hare, lacking in assurance, you have at least a fair chance of realising the valley itself. Its ghosts will become more real than the people you may meet by the road-side. These ghosts solidified for Hugh Walpole in the Herries family, and he has, in a sense, imposed them upon the landscape, just as, in Cornwall, he has imposed upon the landscape the frightful phantom of the Man with Red Hair. Having been chased through a Cornish fog by the ghost of Crispin, I know that this is true: that it is a thing which can be done. It is, in fact, a sort of witchcraft which is possessed by a few novelists, and by none so strongly as by Hugh Walpole.

But it is important to remember, when the dying scream of the witch echoes thinly from the water-side, when the shadow of the horse Mameluke and his rider fall across our path, somewhere down near Rosthwaite, that these ghosts are superimpositions: that they are the phantoms of the phantoms, and not the phantoms themselves. Every romantic who dares into the valley of Borrowdale must meet his own Herries, but it will not necessarily be the Herries of Hugh Walpole. Walpole has given flesh to a mountain elemental after his own fashion.

Relinquishing this subject, which, to the realist, is most tediously unintelligible, I would now state that, since this is not a guide-book, it is not my purpose to write at any length about the beauties of the country. Apart from the fact that nothing I could write could equal the word-painting in the Herries Saga, it seems to me inevitable that one who has been brought up in the shadow of the mountains should lack objectivity in writing of them: that to such a one it should come more easily to write of the mountain influences than of the mountains themselves. It is therefore wiser to leave them alone.

But for the benefit of those who may be moved to make a pious Walpolian pilgrimage to the neighbourhood, I would, for a moment, turn myself into a Cook's guide.



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Yes, dear Sir or Madam: on your right is the river Derwent, into which, a little farther along, Rogue Herries plunged to rescue the body of the witch. We are now passing the little bridge that "raised itself like a cat's back over the divided strands of the river," and that huddle of cottages on the farther bank is Grange, where Hannah Mounsey lived and died. There is to-day a Mounsey living there, the village carpenter: make what you like of it.

This excellent road, you will observe, cuts through the little Cumma Catta wood, and, if you must have it, there on your left is the Bowder Stone. (No, I will not wait while you climb the Bowder Stone; it is a foolish and banal act, savouring of *tourisme*, and let us for pity's sake avoid vulgarity during our pilgrimage.)

We are now coming . . . (observe the dots; they are to mark the passage of time, we are not hurrying) . . . to the village of Rosthwaite. You find the approach to a village reassuring, madam? Well, I do not blame you, for I see you are a sensitive. We are, for the moment, past the worst. The hills have withdrawn themselves a little; we are crossing, in the hoofprints of Mameluke, a small, flat, pastoral valley, ringed, it is true, with the stern and jagged heights, but calm and peaceful enough in itself. Oh, now you are beginning to be tiresome about mountains. The only one that concerns you for the present is Glaramara.

"Over the low wall he could see the lights of the sky clustering about Glaramara's shoulders. Long swathes of yellow lay across the pale ivory, and the edge of the hills rippled with fire."

You don't see anything like that about it, sir? But then, if you will excuse me for pointing it out, you are not Mr. Hugh Walpole: and this does not happen to be that kind of day or hour of the day. Glaramara is that longish, flattened line of hill to your left—not that one, stupid, but the one behind it: I can tell from the focusing of your eyes that you are looking at Thornythwaite or Rosthwaite. Glaramara had, you may remember, a particular message for Rogue Herries—it was the mountain upon

which he first looked from the window of his room, on the morning after his arrival.

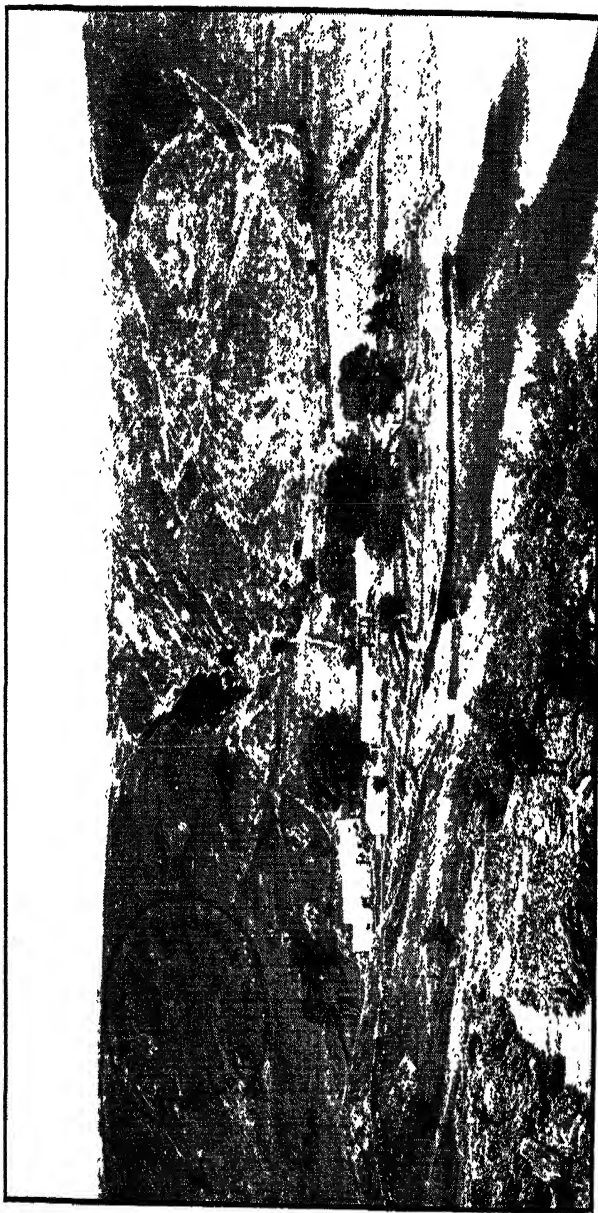
And here, on your left, ladies and gentlemen, is, at last, the house of Herries.

You are disappointed? Let's be honest; so was I. A flat-faced, peaked-up grey house, with every appearance of having been lifted bodily from some genteel provincial suburb.

Forgive me: I have misled you, as I myself was originally misled. This way if you please: up the narrow lane, no more than a cart-track, towards the belt of dark trees—you really cannot see it properly from the main road. This little manse, tee-ed up on its immaculate lawn, is on the site of the original Herries. It may incorporate some of the original masonry. What do you expect, after a hundred years? Herries was old, old as the plum-bago mines, when Francis Herries came from Doncaster to take possession of it; it would be nearly four hundred years old if it were standing to-day.

Yet it is possible that in some room of this very house, rescued from the ruin of the rest, Mirabell died, and Herries died, and Judith was born. Look long enough, especially about twilight of a storm-shotten day in January, and this smug Victorian architecture will fade like a withdrawn mist from the original façade: the high gabled roof and thin latticed windows, the handsomely carved door and shaggy farm byres will appear like a wraith of beauty, and the ghost of a crying child and of a woman with red hair will flicker from pane to pane.

And now prepare yourselves to show your mettle as walkers: to breathe deeply, to mount the Watendlath Fell which hunches its protective shoulder immediately behind Herries—a bagatelle to the native, a pleasantly energetic scramble to the healthy, and a rather prohibitively serious climb for such as are not sound in wind and limb. Pray sort yourselves according to your classifications, and let those who fall into the final category stay behind; we shall only be gone for a little over an hour, and you will admit you have plenty to look at. It may happen that you will choose to stroll through the village of Rosthwaite, so bound up with



[Photo - Mayson, Keswick

WATENDLATH, SHOWING JUDITH'S COTTAGE

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Herries history, on to Seatoller, where the passes of Honister and Sty Head converge. The light is wicked, you say? Precisely; it is wicked. Some grim pieces of Herries drama were played from time to time, beyond those folded ridges, which bore an ill fame even in Rogue Herries' day: you may amuse yourselves by recalling them. How Francis met his doom of love in a cave on Honister, how David fought for his life near Sprinkling Tarn, and how young Tom rendered his soul back to the rocks on Scafell. *En avance, nous autres.*

"Watendlath was an exceedingly remote little valley lying among the higher hills above Borrowdale. It could indeed be scarcely named a valley: rather it was a narrow strip of meadow and stream lying between the wooded hills, Armboth on the Grasmere side and King's How and Brund Fell on the other.

"It was utterly remote. . . ."¹

The meaning of the word "remote" must strike home, as standing high on the hill-side, looking down sheer to the black water, harshly ruffled, and the white of whitewashed barns that seem to hold the place in perpetual mourning, one remembers the tragedy that took place there. There is little John Green House, Judith's house, with its hallan and down-house and house-place, quiet as death, with perhaps a few moody hens or a calf or two lingering in the shadow of its walls. An absence of humankind; an unbreakable silence.

This marks the most significant stage of our pilgrimage. The measure of our reaction to it will be the measure of our acceptance of the flesh-and-blood historical Herries family, as opposed to their romantic evocation. To the true Romantic, obviously, the Herries Saga is as gravely actual as a chapter from a history book: such a one is capable of being betrayed into searching in Rosthwaite churchyard for the Herries tombs for their memorial inscriptions. But for these, who have joined the Men under Skiddaw, there are no inscriptions: their immortality is writ in the hills themselves.

Not that you have now seen all. There is the farther side of the

¹ *Rogue Herries*

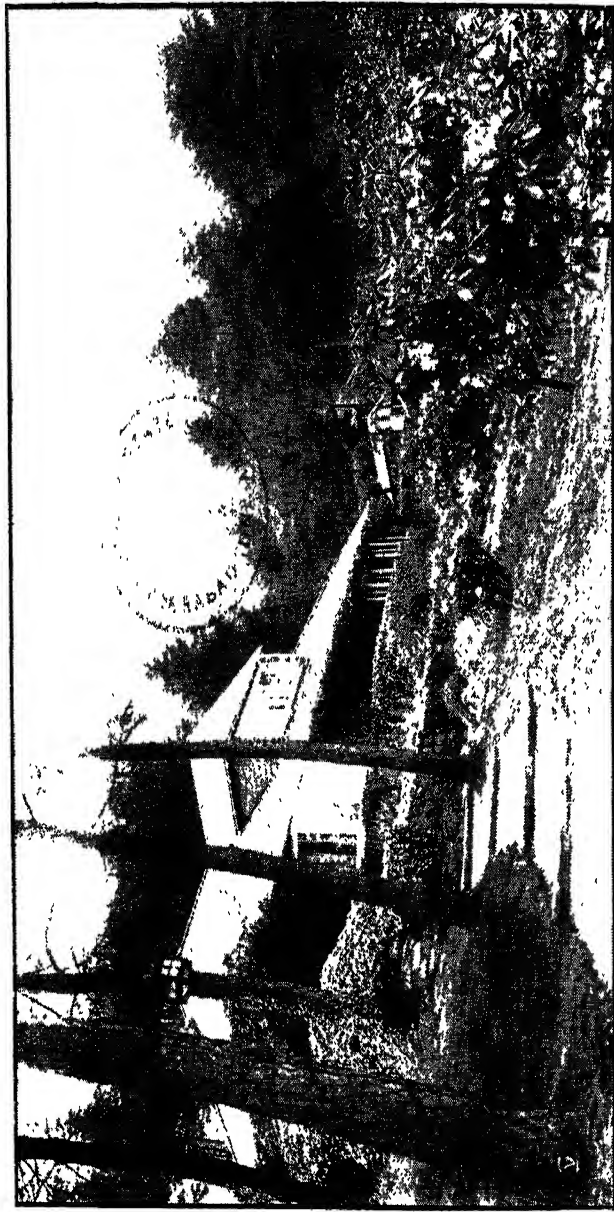
lake to explore—if you are equal to more, at the end of your climb.

You may have the pleasure of identifying for yourselves, ladies and gentlemen, the house where Tom, the unhappy half-Herries, stayed on his last fatal visit. This is easy: the name, Bella Vista, is elegantly inscribed upon a board for your especial benefit; there is nothing to prevent your testing its hospitality, so long as you give fair notice of your intentions.

And Adam's cottage up on the hill-side beneath Catbells is now in possession of a literary gentleman who will, I am sure, be grateful if you curb the ardour of your attentions to his domicile. Reserve that ardour, if you will, for the next stage of your journey: for that breath-taking loveliness that meets you at the bend of the road, where the larchwoods drop away, and Catbells climbs to your left, and on your right the ground slides sheer to the steel-blue lake water far below, and all the mystery of Skiddaw lifts itself, like some Veiled Prophet, into the clouds. What wonder that, with such a vision continually before his eyes, Hugh Walpole found it possible to write:

“It is the quality of this country that, with a structure of rock, naked fell and dark, grim water, it has the power of breaking out into an opulence of light and colour. So the Lake that could be cold as driving snow, harsh like shadowed steel, fierce with white foam as a bird's feathers are blown angrily by storm, now was streaked and veined with shadows of the grape that trembled, as though a hand gently stroked its surface. This trembling was not cold nor wind-swept, but burned with the sun-filled mist. Above these purple shadows the hill-sides were orange clouds, orange in their brighter spaces, but like smouldering, glowing embers where vapour enshrouded them. An isolated field, a blazing tree, a strip of bracken against the dark, plum-coloured islands, shone out like the gilt of missals, damascened, exotic, flaming to the eye where all else was mystery, but the mist above the gold was as dim as the white ash of burnt wood.

“Because the sky was decisive with its virgin chastity of egg-shell blue, the misted land in contrast took all the



[Photo : Mayson, Keswick

ADAM PARIS'S HOUSE, WHICH BECAME VANESSA'S, AND WHERE SHE LIVED
WITH BENJIE

THE HERRIES SAGA

colours of purple, topaz and orange, and laid them under washes of pale gold. And yet, with all this dimness the hills were strong, striking deep into the Lake, and where they topped the mist, hard-ridged against the chill sky. And on Skiddaw there was a sudden flame-shaped crest."¹

I think that the whole of his writings contains no finer example of his power to manipulate words as though they were colours, and everyone familiar with this part of the country must acknowledge the exquisite aptness of the description. There is no mere joyous, almost haphazard flinging together of adjectives and nouns, no verbal inebriation such as one suspects in the jewel-passage out of the *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair*, previously quoted: ecstasy is there—no one could have written such a passage, save in a state of ecstasy—but ecstasy controlled and held in shape by a chosen vocabulary of which not a word fails to register its exact meaning upon the reader's mind.

Rounding the head of the lake, our wanderings bring us to Portinscale and to Crosthwaite, to the house of Pomfret Herries, so different from the old farmhouse up the valley, with its "fine proportion, its roof covered with red tiles, the wrought ironwork across its front showing like lace against stone." There is the house, and there the little old Crosthwaite Church, now knee-deep in reed and lake-water, with a haze of dark moss spread like thin velvet across its crumbling roof. And so we return to Keswick, the dramatic nexus of the Saga, where all scenes of jollity and robust merrymaking, in which the Herries took so strong a delight, take place: which Rogue Herries blackened by selling his mistress for five pieces of silver at the Chinese Fair.

It is hardly possible, on the same day, and using one's own two feet, to follow the northward development of the history to Uldale, which lies in the folded hills beyond Skiddaw: the scene of the patriarchal foundation of the great family whose roots were to bind together all English soil. Over yonder, in Skiddaw Forest, which is no forest, but bleak moorland, was

¹ *Rogue Herries.*

played the grimmest of all the Herries tragedies: there cousin killed cousin, and dragon's teeth were sown in Cumbrian soil.

The drama of Uldale (the house—Fell House—was burnt to the ground in 1883, when Adam Paris, father of Vanessa, perished in the flames) lies for the present-day pilgrim in surveying therefrom, across the valley, the inimical pile of the Fortress itself—abiding example of the waste of energy that hatred entails. There stands the terraced and turreted house overlooking, in the spirit of bitterness and revenge in which it was planned and built, the land that was Judith's. This side a woman—not Judith, but Jennifer—slowly hypnotised into insanity and death, that side a grinning devil, bent on avenging a slight which, from a mustard seed, has grown into a upas tree, that poisons all that come beneath its shadow.

And when you have been over there, and seen the stone flight on which the tap of Uhland's stick echoes in the night watches: when you have looked into the bitter little pond, with its dead leaves and its century-old silt of mud: when you have leaned upon the water-trough with the dolphin's head beside which Vanessa plighted her troth to her forbidden lover: when you have experienced the malign suggestion of the place, you are a step nearer knowledge of the Herries. It is probable also that you will relinquish your attempt to reconcile fiction with history, the ghost with the substance, and that you will make, consciously or unconsciously, an act of faith to these Herries, who, on whatsoever plane they move in what strange air, are, most truly, the very heart of England.

2

The superficial difference between the historical and the "costume" novel lies in the fact that whereas in the former the character-grouping is arranged around some known historical figure, in the latter the central character or characters are fictional, and genuine historical figures are only introduced, if they are introduced at all, to lend "local colour" to the narrative. Hence, while the former is to be taken more or less seriously,



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as an attempt at reconstructive historical writing, the latter is best described as a piece of dignified tushery, wholly unreliable and unrepresentative of whatever period it claims to portray.

The definition is not, however, infallible; for *Regue Herries*, which is concerned with a fictional group of people, is definitely a historical novel; while *The Borderer*, a novel based upon the play of the same name, whose leading characters are Mary Stuart and the Earl of Bothwell, is most certainly not historical at all. We therefore have to probe beneath these superficial distinctions to find the true line of separation between historical and "costume" writing.

The "costume" play and the "costume" novel are the product of the Puritan element in English drama and letters. They exist in order to spare the individual of poor intellectual or moral stamina the impact of the bare historical fact, and they bear as little relation to real life as a First History Primer. Essentially childish and fairy-tale in their approach to history, their spirit is as bogus as their characters; they are the essence of the pseudo-romantic, that boiled-down and devitalised form of romanticism which is the pet abhorrence of the robustly romantic mind. Such, however, is the Puritan bias of the ordinary English reader, the ordinary English playgoer, that up to the earlier decades of the present century the bowdlerisation has been accepted in preference to the historical version. This accounts for the enormous popularity of the novels of Jeffery Farnol, and for the immense popular success of such plays as *David Garrick* and *Sweet Nell of Old Drury*. This preference of illusion to reality, this deliberate drugging of reason, this refusal to see straight is extremely English; it is an essential part of the rather pleasant naïveté of the English character; and it is interesting to observe that it is powerful enough in itself to have given rise to an especial class of literature and drama, which is without counterpart in any other language.

The distinguishing features of this class of writing are that it makes no intellectual or psychological demand upon its public and that it relies for its appeal upon its power to arouse a set of

elementary sentimental emotions. Intellectually, it is cousin german to the Wild West drama of the earlier scenario writers, and resembles them in that no matter whatever parlous situations its heroes and heroines may get themselves into, it is obvious from the first paragraph that villainy will be vanquished and virtue triumph, through the purity of the heroine and the gallantry of the hero.

To the thoughtful reader, the offensiveness of the "costume" or "cloak-and-sword" play or novel lies in its reliance upon (1), the pretty-pretty ideal; (2), the forced situation; (3), the impossible heroic; (4), the made-to-measure sentiment, and (5), the verbal cliché. All heroes must be handsome and gallant, all heroines beautiful and virtuous. They therefore stand for no true heroic ideal, but for a Salvation Army morality which instantly destroys their artistic value. They have no free will; they are merely lay figures, lifted from the cupboard of historical armaments, dusted, provided with fresh wigs and complexions, wound up, and despatched to play their parts as high priests and priestesses of the obvious. Under these conditions it is impossible for a woman who is not sexually virtuous to be a heroine, or for a bad man, in the Salvation Army acceptance of the term, to be a hero—and truth flies out at the window. For, realising that a romantic Queen, the incidents of whose life have made her a national heroine, was certainly a nymphomaniac and probably a lesbian, the author hastily applies a double coat of whitewash and presents her to his public as a martyred angel: which is an outrage both on historical fact and on a character whose rich vitality is implicit with romance. But this class of writer, writing for the class of mind, thinks nothing of bartering both his historical and literary integrity. It does not occur to him, apparently, that, in crippling romance in order to produce the pseudo-romantic (for the benefit of Miss Twinkleton's young ladies), he produces but a poor pale shadow of the thing he might have produced.

Thus it will be seen that in "costume" literature and drama the artistic value is invariably subordinate to the moral value,

which, as a beginning, puts them both outside serious consideration. That morals and art have absolutely no connection with each other is a point of view beyond the comprehension of the British Puritan, and is, of course, the rock on which present-day standards of literary criticism founder.

Moral shilly-shallyings apart, there is something even more offensive to the mind with a genuine respect for historical accuracy in any treatment which distorts or misrepresents or even ignores contemporary manners. One of the grosser dishonesties of which the "costume" writer is guilty is of seizing all the superficialities of dress, of vocabulary and of conduct, and of grafting them on to his lay figures with deliberate intent to deceive. In brief, he is in bondage to a schoolroom convention, and it is not to be wondered that the wind blows through characters conceived in this spirit of frivolity. The rising generation is certainly to be praised for setting its face uncompromisingly against these insults to its intelligence. In chasing dramatists of this class off the stage, and novelists of the same order into the dustier corners of the public libraries, it is raising the standard of artistic integrity.

There will always be people who will say that it adds nothing to their appreciation of Queen Elizabeth to be told that she spat and scratched herself in public, and indulged in lewd jesting with her courtiers. It is the business of the historical novelist to make them understand that the spitting and scratching, unimportant in itself, derives its interest from the light which it throws upon contemporary manners, without knowledge of which it is impossible to appreciate the psychology of the period. The novelist who fails to make this clear, who leaves the unsophisticated personal habits of Queen Elizabeth to be the focal interest of the scene or chapter, without relating them to the general picture which is being built up, of the Elizabethan social code, has not completed his task. He has not proved, to the satisfaction of his readers, that no action has importance in itself, that every action derives its importance from its context.

That there is none of this building in the "costume" novel constitutes one of its major weaknesses. There the tendency is to treat every bit of contemporary colour from a purely decorative standpoint—like bits of china and glass grouped upon a mantelpiece, with no sense of utility or explanation.

Thus, in conclusion, the "costume" novel or drama may be summed up as an uncourageous approach to the nobilities of history: as essentially false and pretentious as the Clarkson wig and the hired domino. It can be satisfactory only to a very flimsy type of mind, for to accept it is to shanghai all one's powers of judgment and reasoning.

The first, chronologically, and, of his period, the first in order of importance, of the modern historical novelists was Maurice Hewlett. No writer has succeeded in getting on paper with so admirable an impartiality both the glory and the squalor of the Middle Ages; none has wielded with so masterly a prodigality the brush dripping with the vermilion and sapphire and gold of chivalry, the burin of the later Georgian period. Read *Richard Yea and Nay*, read *Mrs. Lancelot*, if you really wish to know how people lived in those times. How does he do it? Not by multiplying portcullis by drawbridge, not by stunning us with descriptive matter of doubtful authenticity, but merely by showing us these people's minds; how they thought, what they said. He brought to his task, of course, a liberal imagination and a verbal preciosity which was not every man's taste, a style at times nearly as obscure as Meredith. But because he troubled himself on the whole less with the actions of his characters than with the mental processes which led up to those actions: because he never allowed a plot to lead him by the nose, but most patiently unravelled his threads before proceeding on his way, Maurice Hewlett is an historical novelist. Whatever bravura he may choose to execute upon an historical theme he is historical. To read *Buondelmonte's Saga* and *The Heart's Key* (in *Fond Adventures*) or *Bendish* or *The Queen's Quair* is to drain the very lees of history. The page beneath your hand turns to parchment, to black-letter or to a monk's crabbed scrawl.

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After Hewlett there was a lapse in historical novel writing. The war came along: publishers were shy of the historical novel, even more so of the "costume" one. It was not, they said very rightly, the time for gadzookery. To read history you needed leisure, and leisure had vanished out of most people's lives. They wanted to read—when they had time to read—about light, lively things. History was in the making—there was no need to go to the bookshelves for it. All of which was very right and proper. But it is possible that the publishers did not notice—immediately—certain straws which showed which way the wind was blowing. Everyone was not reading Shaw and Wells and Bennett—or even Walpole! Not only Oppenheim and Locke were in demand at the libraries. The tide of literary realism was presently to sweep England from shore to shore, but it was surprising what a number of people found time to read biographies—and not only the modern, scandalous ones, either. And the time was at hand when England went biography mad: when every kind of known and unknown person apparently had nothing to do but fling together a few hundred pages of "random recollections" and almost any publisher would accept them and bring them out at eight and six, or half a guinea, or even twenty-one shillings, if the name of the author carried sufficient weight to warrant so bold a demand: until some bright irreverent spirit launched a lampoon in the form of spoof biography, which satirised the situation, but altered it not one whit.¹

And what was this craze for biography reading but a craze for history, of a kind? Kings, queens, all kinds of titled and aristocratic people led the way in order of popularity: crowns are implicit in the English love of romance, with coronets not so far behind: and both crowns and coronets are history. The romantic revival was at hand, and, with the romantic revival, the demand for the historical novel.

But not the historical novel on the old pattern: no, thank you. And most certainly not the costume novel. Like the publishers,

¹ *I Think I Remember*, by Magdalen King-Hall.

the public had done with gadzookery. They wanted something authentic. The biographies had given them an inkling of how such things ought to be handled. The biographies had torn down a goodly number of musty old tapestries, and what the public found behind them was extremely diverting. That's the way we want our history written, they were crying. They had learnt by now that a king does not go to bed in his crown, and that court life is more often boring than it is magnificent. The Ordinary Reader who had, of course, always been aware of these things, discovered M. André Maurois and Mr. Lytton Strachey, and learnt from them that simple truth was at least ten times more entertaining than fairy-tale, and that fiction derives a peculiar value from being presented as fact, and that fact loses half its factual value if it is lied about, and dressed up, and made to jump through hoops at the bidding of a circus-master author.

And so the historical novel came to rebirth—but in a new and exciting form.

Hugh Walpole in his *Herries Saga* so epitomises the new form that we may take the four *Herries* novels as the text of our enquiry into the modern development of the historical novel. Although he was not the first of the modern novelists to experiment in the form, it may be generally conceded that *Rogue Herries* blazed the trail for the renaissance of the romantic interest. Those of us who rashly produced historical novels prior to the *Herries* suffered because we had not Hugh Walpole to push the door open for us; for it took all the prestige of an established name to compel the publishers to reconsider their attitude. Once they had been forced, by the enormous immediate success of the first *Herries* book, to realise that there was a public for historical novels, the field was clear for such as *Royal Flush* and *They Were Defeated*, to name only two of the important works that followed where *Rogue Herries* had led.

The elements which accounted for the decline of the old historical novel were, undoubtedly, its longwindedness, its pomposity, its museum atmosphere (I am speaking, let it be remembered, on behalf of the modern Ordinary Reader) and the

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time barrier which it erected between the *then* and the *now*. In every possible way it emphasised the "long, long ago," and seemed at pains to impress upon its readers that its characters were now dust. (In fact, not a few have a special paragraph to that effect, somewhere near the end.) It had no *immediacy*. And, of course, it suffered excruciatingly from being adopted as schoolroom literature, as set books for examination. It takes the majority of people many years to dissociate *The Last Days of Pompeii* from that so vilely distinctive smell of inkpots and blotting paper, from the weary and surreptitious watching of the clock, the stutter and stumble of classmates, the corrective drone of the teacher's voice. And, if we pause to consider for a moment, it will become patent that the very fact of the adoption of such novels for educational purposes in English schools proved beyond doubt an absence of authenticity, of realism, a glossing over of character and incident; in brief, a fairy-tale presentation that is irksome to the realistic and truth-seeking present-day mind. Like the schoolroom primer, like the "costume" novel, the historical novel of the old pattern only presents history from a limited and strictly moral angle.

The old historical novelist was too much in awe of his period, too deeply impressed by his historic motive, to come to grips with his subject. He was inclined to see his period through the wrong end of a telescope: so that all the subtler qualities, all the embroideries, were blurred out, and the things which remained were the big things: the big heroism, the big villainy: all the things which were exceptional and exaggerated and extravagant. He would not allow that human beings are far more often simply silly than they are either heroic or ignoble.

Here, one admits, he proves his romanticism, his "dædal optimism." But he neglects an important factor in his romantic structure.

A superficial reason for the decline of the historical novel may also have been its employment of a vocabulary, of a conversational medium which, to the modern ordinary reader obscures rather than expresses the meaning and thoughts of its characters. Until we arrive at the present century, at the

work of such young writers as Lorna Rea and Theodora Benson, both of whom have the knack of pinning down the spoken word without literary quirk or quibble, the written style is no criterion of conversational idiom. It is only within the last decade that stage conversations have become completely naturalistic. Therefore the historical novelist of the last century invented a conversational formula which is excessively irksome and irritating to the reader of to-day—all the more so because it conveys no assurance of authenticity. As regards the narrative scenes of such novels—a characteristic of the modern ordinary reader is his desire to arrive as directly as possible at his literary objective: he therefore has little patience with the grandiloquence and the mannerisms favoured by his more leisured forefathers; he resents them, for they conceal history, rather than reveal it to him.

So far it does not seem as though there was much to choose between the historical and the "costume" novel; but their principal and positive difference lies in the fact that, whereas the historical novel was conceived in solemnity, in lawful wedlock between the narrator's historical and his fictional sense, the "costume" novel was the unwarrantable outcome of a flirtation between the narrator and the lighter aspects of history. In the first the historical interest is emphasised, in the second it is subordinated to more frivolous matter. The "costume" novel adhered to the convention of the happy ending, and was primarily designed to suit the taste of that section of the public which, although romantically minded, was unequal to the Homeric tussle with the more serious writers.

The first task which lay before the reformers of the historical novel was the clearance of ancient formulæ, and the replacement of the "long-long ago" perspective with a sharper angle of vision. They had to convince their readers of a thing that everyone knows theoretically: that human nature in the eighth or the twelfth or the sixteenth century reacted to certain common stimuli in precisely the same manner in which it reacts in the present day: and that it expressed its feelings in exactly the same

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essence, albeit modified by certain turns of expression which, since they are superficial, may be ignored. They had to oust the false in order to make room for the true. And they had to accept as their first premise the apparently paradoxical statement that the twentieth-century gateway to the kingdom of romance is labelled *Realism*, and that the novelist who fails to make use of this gateway can never reach his objective.

What author was better able to understand this paradox than Hugh Walpole, who, from his first published work, had sedulously employed the realistic convention as the vehicle of his romance?

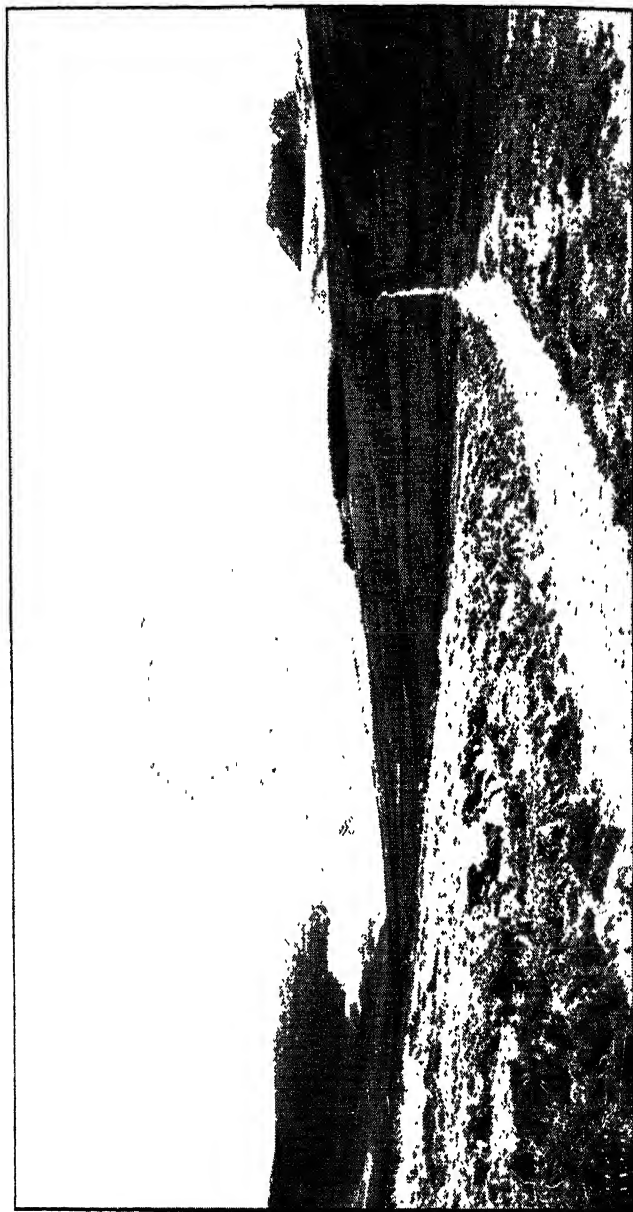
Thus it comes to pass that one can read *Rogue Herries*, which opens in the year 1720 and closes in 1774: *Judith Paris*, which carries us over to the second decade of the eighteenth century, and *The Fortress*, which ends on Judith's hundredth birthday in the year 1874 with the same sense of immediacy, of the living and eternal present with which one reads the war-time section of *Vanessa*, which, with its sequel, brings the narrative up to the year 1932.

Instead of making the path of the reader difficult by insistence upon the difference between the eighteenth century and the twentieth, Hugh Walpole employs every tacit means of making him realise that as it was, it now is, and ever shall be, world without end. *Rogue Herries* talking to his son David, is not an eighteenth-century marionette, with a mouthful of contemporary oaths and expletives, but any father talking to any son, whom he adores. *Judith Paris* is no Regency puppet, but just such a woman as the present century is breeding—of independent mentality and strong personal magnetism. Neither is a "type" character, neither is to be disposed of with a label—"This man is bad"—"This woman is good." Herries, who comes into the valley with "lechery and drunkenness, lasciviousness and cruelty riding him full strength," has yet the "longing for what was not, that dream of Paradise round the corner": *Judith Paris*, his daughter, who dominates every human being with whom she comes in contact, save her own son, and lives to become the head of the vast family, goes to Paris to have an illegitimate child, begotten by a man she does not love in a dream

of the one whom she has loved and lost. How true is this to the human comedy which the old historical novelists, with their old pomposities, never allowed us to glimpse!

And, most vital of all points, the *Herries Saga* enshrines the apical difference between the old and the new historical novel by replacing plot with psychological development, the manufactured sensation with the spontaneous emotion. The business of the modern author is to put thought and action in their proper sequence, so that the former is seen to be unmistakably the more important, and the second exists only in the sense of a Q.E.D. to the mental processes. In applying this method to his *Herries Saga* Hugh Walpole redeemed history from the dustheap and set his characters and his incidents in the very foreground of his readers' consciousness, not as a group of people who lived very many years ago, and wore odd clothes, and used odd expressions. Their thoughts are the very thoughts of people who are living to-day; their aspirations, their fears, their sorrows and delights are the same: and if their actions are not identical, if they are in some degree conditioned by the times in which they lived (murder, for example, is no longer convenient or practical, under the present social regime), we who live in a more restricted age have certainly felt at some time or other that we would like to do the things they did. But the spiritual force of the *Herries*, their strange duality, is from start to finish far more thrilling than any of the things they actually do: the spiritual aspect invariably overshadows any material situation which may arise.

For example. There are, to my mind, three great emotional peaks in the course of the four novels—there are, of course, many others, which may, to individual readers, represent more than the three which I have selected for the purpose of my argument. The first is the scene between Uhland and John, which may be taken to represent the dramatic apex of the novels. In this scene is focused, not merely the hatred of one man for another; its interest is definitely not in the gun shot that ends it: but in the fact that herein is gathered all the hatred and malice and ill-wishing of one branch of the family for another. It



[Photo Mayson, Keswick

SKIDDAW HOUSE, WHERE UHLAND AND JOHN HAD THEIR FATAL MEETING

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contains Rogue Herries' bitter hatred of his brother Pomfret; it contains Christabel's broken fan and her quarrel with Jennifer and all the separation and side-taking among Herries which followed that so seemingly trivial incident; it contains Walter's persecution of Francis and Francis' suicide; it contains the loathing of Uhland for the man to whom his sister Elizabeth was married; and in its bitter soil are implanted the germs of Walter's decline and Ellis's madness. The protagonists are less man and man than dark messengers of the occult powers that govern the house of Herries: the one, Uhland, incarnate hatred, the other, John, in the grip of the destiny which had willed him, from birth, towards his fearful end.

The second scene, which may stand for the apex of sentiment of family pride, warmth and tenderness, for the sinking of quarrels and the reforging of links—maybe to be broken in the future, but, for the present, bright, shining and secure—is the occasion of Judith's hundredth birthday, with which the third volume closes, with which the fourth, by a charming and original literary device, is made to open.

“As the great day of November 28th, 1874, approached ever more nearly, it may be said without very much exaggeration that all the Herries all over England held their breath. Would she do it? Could she last the course? Were they once more in their history to touch the Hundred?”¹

This is the breathless paragraph which ushers in one of Hugh Walpole's most emotional pieces of writing. It is not merely a question of an old lady making her century, but a great Herries demonstration, a thing linked vitally into the nation's history. Judith was:

“—*really* famous, so that all kinds of people asked after her. Mr. Disraeli had known her, Dickens and Thackeray in their day had heard of her, the Bishop of Polchester often asked Rodney about her, and as to the North itself—why, everyone knew her and was proud of her!”²

¹ *Judith Paris.*

² *Ibid.*

And so to the climax, where death is described more beautifully than, surely, it has ever been done before:

"—and for those silent motionless watchers was there a sudden opening of the gates, a running out of a little figure, happy, daring, triumphant, a moment's stare up and down the road, and then a cry:

" ' Georges! Georges! . . . Charlie! Warren! . . . Father! ' " ¹

The third peak is the spiritual triumph of Vanessa, giving up her lover, Benjie, for the sake of her mad husband, Ellis. One feels that no other Herries would have been capable of this renunciative act: that all the ideality, all the romanticism, all the beauty and fineness and nobility that ran in a thin silver stream from generation to generation of Herries has been gathered into a deep pool in Vanessa: a pool of " fierce and lonely purity," the pool Rogue Herries knew, from which rose the vision of the Great White Horse. One feels in Vanessa the solution of all those imponderable problems which vexed the soul of her great-grandfather, that passed from his loins into his grandson Francis, and into Francis's son John, and from John into the body of her lover Benjamin: problems that have tormented all ages and all men, the why and the wherefore of things, and what things not one man in a hundred can tell:

" ' What's my question been? I don't know myself. That's the odd thing. I don't know either the question or the answer. I puzzle my head sometimes till it breaks. Yes, breaks. Splits like a fig. Then I think the answer will be in there. It must be. That's the thing that spins round and round and asks all the questions. But if it has the questions then it must have the answers, too. These questions. Why is the sky grey to-day, my dear, and being grey, with a touch of rose to it, why does my heart thump? Why cannot I leave this place, this tumbled heap of stones, but must hang on always staring at a humped hill and a pocketful of rank grass?

¹ *Vanessa*.

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Yes, split your brain, and dig in the mess with your fingers for the answer.' ”¹

That is the voice of Rogue Herries, the character to which Hugh Walpole has brought his utmost thunder, whose reverberations ring down the centuries. It is the worst part of the Rogue that returns to earth in Uhland, it is his best that returns in Benjie. It is the ideal of himself which lurks behind the pitiable mask that becomes at last articulate in Vanessa. In Rogue Herries Hugh Walpole has created for us a fallen angel, embodiment of all lost causes, all vain dreams, all the *Schweimerei* of which only the thwarted idealist is capable. *Ecco vi l'uom ch'è stato all Inferno*. It is his descendant, Vanessa, who contrives, if not to answer the question, at least to formulate it. “Only connect. . . . Only connect.” The key of connection between the material and the spiritual life is her life’s problem; her last letter to Benjie proclaims her belief in God—the belief, which, denied to her great-grandfather, was the root of his torment.

Thus, in these three selected emotional peaks, one may observe the new approach to history, which Hugh Walpole, although not positively a pioneer (others had done the pioneer work for him), exploits with ardour in the Herries Saga.

Let us first examine the claim of the four books—or, at any rate, the first three—to be classified as historical novels, since they are concerned with a fictional group of characters none of whom, even in a fictional sense, lay any positive claim to influencing national history.

The dictionary offers us, among alternatives, the following definition of the word History: “A systematic account of the origin and progress of a nation.” This, with your kind permission, we shall adopt as justification of the title of the Herries novels to the status of historical novels; for in them Hugh Walpole traces a panorama of English events which encompasses two centuries, and, through the persons of his Herries, who are the very bone and sinew of the English character, unfurls the standard of an epic of patriotism.

¹ *Rogue Herries*.

3

"The history of any English family . . . is basically comedy rather than tragedy; comedy decorated with incongruous things like spring flowers, tea-pots, the Battle of Trafalgar, London fogs, beer and country vicarages. This confident security is the true reason of our magnificent sequence of great poets. Poetry is roused by sheer rebellious indignation, so vilely exasperating is it to argue with in imagination."¹

The final sentence of the above quotation is, of course, Mr. Walpole at his worst: galloping away on his hobby-horse of an idea so enchantingly lucid to himself that he cannot be bothered about his relative pronouns. The "it" may stand for poetry, or for the "confident security" referred to in the previous sentence. One fact emerges: that nothing is more revolting to the poetic nature than confident security of any kind. The poet must live for ever on a volcano. Poetry, like genius (as Mr. James Agate remarks somewhere), is of the nature of a volcanic upheaval, and it is the poet's protest against this confident security, this national smugness of self-satisfaction, which has given England her poetic succession.

In the Herries books Hugh Walpole performed his great act of patriotism: as surely an act of patriotism as his going out to Russia in 1914. It is his patriotic Credo, his England, my England: the deep and emotional expression of all that an Englishman feels about his country, and, at the same time, a clear, if not altogether dispassionate, analysis of the qualities and defects which placed England in the position which she occupied at the beginning of the present century.

The English have earned—it is difficult, offhand, to say on what grounds—a superficial reputation for hard-headedness, lack of imagination, stolidity: whereas it is obvious from a very cursory perusal of history books that there is no nation more emotional, more idealistic, more at the mercy of the gesture. The Englishman's compulsion to perform the gesture is only equalled by his susceptibility to its performance by

¹ *Rogue Herries.*

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someone else. The idealistic appeal evokes a quicker sentimental response from an Englishman than from a man of any other nationality, but in order to cloak this susceptibility he has invented a complicated code which is variously known as "good form" or "playing the game." It is a curious fact that the one complimentary adjective which is most generally bestowed upon the Englishman is that he is sincere, which is the one least applicable to him. For sincere the Englishman positively is not. He is simply the Perfect Behaviourist. He lives in a continual condition of professing shame of his finer instincts, whereas, as anyone can tell you, he is fundamentally conceited about them, and deeply convinced that their existence renders him superior to every creature under the sun.

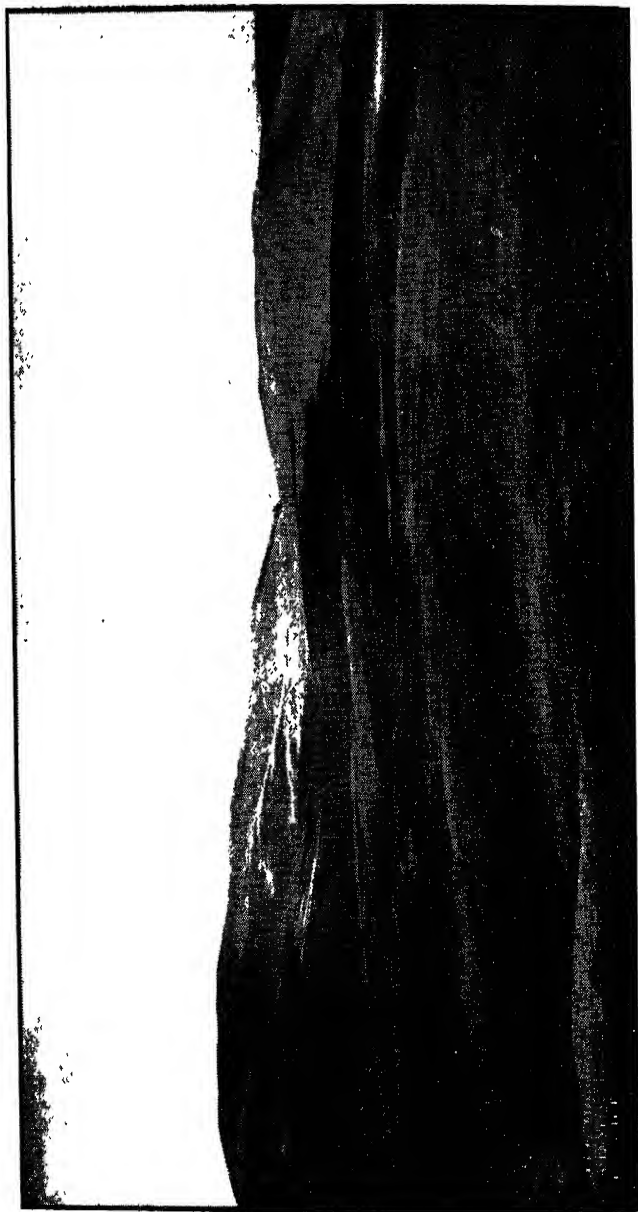
The national character, as summarised by Hugh Walpole, may be divided into Citizens and Seekers (I am indebted to Elfriede Gladow, and her examination of *Romantic Elements in Hugh Walpole's Novels*, for the terms). To the former belong the Stay-at-Homes, the Town Councillors, the Philistines, and the Materialists; to the latter the Explorers, the Treasure-Hunters, the Artists, the Poets and the Marred Angels. The good, sober Citizen element is fully balanced by the Seeker, or Mystery-Monger (the second expression is Mr. Walpole's), and from their overlap springs the third element, that unhappy, half-and-half, *dépaysé* being whose life is a perpetual riddle to himself and his associates, who is unable to get on terms with existence, and who, plagued by realisation of his uncertain status, summons his Behaviourism to cloak his guilty secret from the cradle to the grave. He is the innocent canker at the heart of society, the softness which, interposed between the bright, bared steel of his progenitors, deadens the progressive spark that warfare engenders.

In the Herries Saga Hugh Walpole has balanced the two major forces and epitomised England in a fashion unequalled by any other writer of his generation. The four Herries novels are not class novels, in the sense that the Forsyte Saga is a class novel: the class motif is subservient to the family motif, to the spiritual and material development during two centuries of a

germ nurtured on Cumbrian soil. The penetrant and propagative force of this germ is traced in the ramifications of the Herries family, its connections in every part of England from north to south, until it becomes like the couch grass which binds the soil together. And the family motif in its turn is subdued by the national motif, to the power of people like the Herries to make England what it is.

I think it may be conceded, even by the most prejudiced decrrier of the North, that the English character tightens, becomes more aggressively English, the farther north it travels. The reason is obvious: the farther a region is from metropolitan influence the more regional it must remain, breeding its own rules of society, its own idioms of conduct and speech and its own forms of culture. The English character is undoubtedly strengthened, in the sense of obstination, by our insularity, and the farther north one goes the more marked become our national characteristics, the more arrogant their forms of expression.

It is rarely, however, that the Southerner remembers, in representing our "barbarism," our lack of superficial graces and our distressingly plain speech (I speak as one not, unfortunately, Northern born, but Northern bred), that these racial awkwardnesses are not the outcome of a wilful boorishness, but are the inherited result of the ceaseless struggle with every sort of natural and human enemy in which, for centuries, the Northerner was engaged. He has not yet had time to settle down, to become soft and placable and docile; I doubt that he ever will. Life in the North of England is still a struggle; it is still difficult, unless one is wealthy, to avail oneself of many of the advantages which to the South are a commonplace. Culture comes to us slowly, tardily, and has—let us admit it—an almost impenetrable wall of prejudice through which to break. In the North the old saying that what was good enough for our grandparents is good enough for us dies hard. This was our proud defence when civilisation (in the sense of modernism) refused to come our way; it has become an habitual excuse to which our geographical inaccessibility (from the Southerner's point of view) lends colour.



[Photo : Mayson, Keswick

SKIDDAW FOREST, WHERE THE DEATH OF UHLAND AND JOHN TOOK PLACE

THE HERRIES SAGA

The Lakeland mountains have sheltered rebels and refugees since the Norman Conquest. In no region was the agony of living so concentrated. No region has so many tales to tell of eternal watchfulness, eternal fear. Lakelanders were outlaws, and Lakeland was regarded with horror by all outlanders, the names of its overlords carried a grim significance. And even more awful, to the outlander, were its natural phenomena of light and wind. Skiddaw like a burning mountain: the helm-wind that rose like the vengeance of God, after William II's soldiery crucified and disembowelled old Ari Knudsen.

A light on a hill, a shadow across a valley, crushed grass, a broken twig—these have held a dread message that every child was trained to interpret.

Loneliness and suffering have been the lot of the Cumbrian. But out of loneliness comes strength of soul, and out of suffering fortitude. This helps to explain the powerful influence exercised by Northern blood, wherever one happens to meet it. It explains why the North has always in its gift a peculiar spiritual and moral strength which, turned to national service, justifies the proud Herries boast that they are the backbone of the English nation.

Northerners are natural martyrs, as they are natural dreamers: how could they be otherwise, while their sheep feed upon the grass whose roots the blood of their forefathers has watered? But there is nothing passive in either their martyrdom or their dreaming. The mountains themselves forbid passivity. It is impossible to be passive in a land where to eat means a struggle, a hand-to-hand tussle with Nature, and to clothe oneself a self-denial. In the Northerner you will find the reconciliation of the romantic and the realist: for tradition is inescapable, even to-day it conditions the principal actions of the people: and the will to live forces man still into harsh contacts with Nature, which quicken his zest for pleasure of the crudest kind.

If I have written somewhat tediously and at length upon the Northern character, it is because, without some special knowledge of that character, one cannot read the Herries Saga for what it is worth. In all save the first book the character is

shown in various stages of modification, either through education, intermarriage, urban influence, foreign influence or mere time progress. Nothing can stand still. But in *Rogue Herries* Hugh Walpole has seized upon a moment of pause: in a single character he has given us all the grandeur, bestiality, tenderness, savagery, love, lust, fidelity, treachery, idealism and non-idealism of which the primitive Northerner was capable—which to-day form the basis of the Northern character. Without special knowledge he has looked upon the hills, and known intuitively what they could do to a man.

It is not to be expected that every Northerner will accept his interpretation; we are a stiff-necked race, ungracious about criticism; we pretend we do not care for flattery but we are but human after all! But there must be many who are grateful to him, because he has not flattered: because he has cared for and respected us enough not to flatter us; and a majority who will accept the portrait of Rogue Herries as readily as they accept Pomfret Herries for the reverse of the medal—for the citizen-Herries, whose many descendants peter out into solid middle-class mediocrity without so much as a glimpse of that Invisible which haunts and harasses Francis Herries' direct line.

There are only two Herries to whom the love of England is not a governing motive; one is Uhland the son of Walter, who, as we have seen, is incarnate Hatred, and John the son of Francis the second, who is Fear. These two, demon-possessed, have nothing to spare from their personal struggle for ulterior motive.

When Rogue Herries says to the Young Pretender,

"I would only say that I love England with a passion. I believe that you have the same love"¹

he speaks for the whole of his race. It is as Benjie might have spoken in 1932. Herries is England and England Herries. The Herries who accept this statement quite simply are the successful ones; those who attempt to give it an individualistic kink or interpretation are failures. Such a one is Francis the son of

¹ *Rogue Herries*.

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David, the Rogue's grandson, the democratic idealist; Adam Paris, Judith's son, embraces Chartism, and finds he is led astray by wandering fires. These are matters too vast, too unsimple for the Herries; in entertaining them they court defeat. England is Herries and Herries England; upon this motto, as on a warhorse, the Herries ride to glory.

"Wealth meant little in the Herries blood. They had not at all like certain other famous English families the sense of property. They were indeed quite above and outside this sense, because to be a Herries was enough, and rich or poor, you were of equal and exceptional importance. No, the Herries pride, of which there was always God's plenty) was based on two magnificent foundations: England and Common sense. When you said England you said Herries, and when you said Herries you said No Nonsense. In this lies any interest that there may be in a study of the Herries character—that there was something in the Herries blood demanding that their castle of common sense should be persistently attacked, and almost always from within. Again and again these attacks occur, and with every fresh battle new history is made."¹

The Herries trust in Common Sense, their profound mistrust of Imagination, Originality, Individualism and the Fantastic in general is based upon expediency: for they know that all the pomp and circumstance of their tribe, worthily upheld by Rock-ages, Cards and the fine London House of Herries is at the mercy of such outlaws as Judith and the execrable but adorable Benjie. It is these adventurers and visionaries who have, from generation to generation, sent the blasts of scandal scudding about the family chimney-stacks.

"They cared so much for their family, for their own standing, their own importance in England that no vulgar amassing of wealth could do anything but damage their self-approval.² But then, again, their family pride was so un-

¹ *Rogue Herries.*

² Nowhere is this more clearly shown than in the dying speech of Will Herries: "*I have wanted the wrong things.*"

conscious, so completely taken for granted, that they never thought of it, talked of it, or defended it. The English have always had this quality of confident security, and it makes them remote from the rest of the world, and will always isolate them whether their island continues to be an island or not. It accounts for their universal unpopularity, for their insular stubbornness, their hypocrisy and their profound calm in a crisis. It accounts also for a generous warmth of heart hidden under an absurd armour of frigid suspicion of strangers. It accounts for their poetry, their lack of imagination, their peculiar humour, their irritating conceit and arrogance in foreign countries, and a certain naïve youthfulness which is both absurd and attractive.”¹

That is an admirable summary of the strength and the weakness of the English character, which is the Herries character exemplified in the four great branches of the family:

“The Uldale family stood for Country Life, Pomfret’s family for London, the Cards in Bournemouth for Social Intercourse, and the Rockages for the Ruling Classes: yes, and more than that, for the two strong elements of the Ruling Classes at the end of the eighteenth century in England, namely, the arrogance of a dominating Aristocracy and the narrowness but courage of Methodism.”

Even that arch-rebel, Judith, whose long struggle to avoid absorption into this formidable body ends with her domination of their ranks, is brought to recognise, at the very height of her rebellion, their national significance.

“She had not realised *how* important the Herries had grown . . . They believed in England, they believed—almost terribly—in themselves. O how they believed! What unquestioning confidence they had. Everything, everything was right with England, from her Government to her furniture, and Judith realised, as she looked about her . . . that there was something fine and grand in their faith, that these men and women

¹ *Rogue Herries.*

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were making England what she was, England the dominant Power of the World, the Queen of the Earth.”¹

Vanessa’s vision of the female Herries as National Beneficence is only another angle of this pride-of-England, this intention, through the very fact of being Herries, of serving her, which finds expression in Benjie’s rushing off to the South African War at the age of forty-three, joining a Russian Otriad at sixty-six, and taking his active share in the preservation of public morale in the General Strike of 1926, after his seventieth birthday. And it is Vanessa, the finest, most sensitive and spiritual of all the Herries, who sums up the Herries’ God, the God of England, in these words:

“A three-faced god, one face Queen Victoria, one face Commerce, and one face the Herries features, high cheek-bones, noble foreheads and cold eyes.”²

The patriotism of the Herries family, like the patriotism of all nations and of all families, is cut in two facets: the first is the love of country, and the second is the love of local soil. The one is closely interwoven with the other. Of David Herries we read:

“His patriotism was like the patriotism of most men, founded on a stone, a flower, the sound of a stream, a clod of earth, the rustle of a tree, but it spread from these things until it embraced the earth, the moon and the stars at one stretch, and dug pits in his soul at the other.”³

It is Francis, the Rogue, who first discovers the meaning of the soil, when, at the deathbed of Margaret, the wife whom he had never loved, whom he pitied because he had never loved her—

“All human relationships seemed to him miserable things . . . all false, all betraying.”⁴

Like others before him he turns to the soil for comfort.

“The soil came and built itself about his heart. He was earthed in: the smell and the tang and the grit of it were in his eyes and his nostrils. His heavy boots were caked with mud, and when he straightened himself this fresh sharp ache in his back called out to him with a friendly voice.”⁵

¹ *The Fortress.*

² *Vanessa.*

³ *Rogue Herries.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

So he gives himself to the bitter, unyielding and pitiless earth, which he loves from that day with passion, because he hopes and believes that some day it will answer his question that torments him lifelong, because he knows neither question nor answer. Unlike his son David, he does not realise that a man must conquer the soil or be conquered by it: his decadence of body and soul and spirit dates from this hour.

It is David, the Well-Beloved, who loves and conquers the soil, because he has no question to ask: because the only thing that he requires of the Cumbrian earth is that it shall respond to his husbandry. He leaves the old, hopeless and heartless house in Borrowdale, and takes his young wife to Uldale, which, owing to the strength and solidity and fineness of his character, becomes the patriarchal roof-tree of the family. There are no ghosts at Uldale: no unanswered questions trembling in the air: no agony of the might-have-been. But there is good land, farmed wisely and well, and beneficence and prosperity which put the foundation under Will's future commercial triumphs.

It is Judith's love of the soil that causes her to live lonely and patient in Watendlath during the long absences of her husband, Georges Paris. Her love for Charlie Watson is the love of the soil, and when she forsakes her soil she forsakes herself. From London she cries out her recognition of this fact:

“Half of me is so Herries that I can understand Will's ambition and Carey's pride and am proud of Jennifer's beauty because she is Herries like myself. But the other half of me is . . . lost in Cumberland peat. That's from my father, and I doubt it will ruin me in the end.”¹

It is Walter's impure and perfect love of the soil that draws him back to Cumberland, after the family is established in the South. “He loves the land because he wishes to impress himself upon it”: he loves it “as an animal loves its home.” And the lust to dominate it, to avenge himself on Francis and Jennifer by his domination, brings him from London, where he cannot be

¹ *Judith Paris.*



Photo M. A. C. E.

ULDALE, WHERE DAVID HERRIES FOUNDED HIS FAMILY; THE HOUSE WAS
BURNED DOWN

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great, to Westaways, where he fancies he can achieve greatness.

Adam Paris learns his love of the soil from his tutor, and since this involves one of Hugh Walpole's most beautiful pieces of descriptive writing, no apology is needed for a lengthy quotation:

" Rackstraw taught him to see the country rightly. It was a country, he said, of *clouds* and *stones*. Stone walls, grey clouds, stone-coloured seagulls on dark fields like fragments of white stone, streaks of snow in winter-thin cloth of stone and above these stony crags pinnacles of stone, needles of stone, piercing a stony sky. He learnt to see a small imprisoned valley, windswept, as a living thing, subject to growth and decay like himself. . . . The clouds feeding the streams, the streams fighting the stones, life moving ceaselessly from form to form, from pattern to pattern.

" He learnt that it was impossible to live in the country, loving it, without having always in the heart the colour and shape of clouds. When, later, the drive of his life carried him to the south, he brought the clouds with him; he was never again to be rid of them. He knew all their patterns, forms and vagaries. He knew the clouds that flew in flags and pinions of flame and smoke over the brow of the hill, driven forward as though by gigantic bellows, he knew the moth-coloured clouds that with soft persistence gathered in little companies against a sky of jade in winter above sun-drenched snow, he knew the fierce arrogant clouds of jet and indigo that leapt upon a pale sky and swallowed it, he knew the gay troops of cloud that danced and quivered around the sun, he knew the shining clouds that the moon, orange-ringed, gathered round her on a frosty night when the hoar glittered on the grass and the only sound under the black trees was the chatter of the running streams. The clouds were of themselves reason enough why this country was first for him in the world."¹

Rackstraw teaches him "detail and reality": the trees, ash and oak, birch and thorn, holly and hazel: the birds—

¹ *The Fortress.*

"He felt like his own the flight of the peregrine, the black-and-white wheatear, and the mocking little cry of the sand-piper as it flitted in front of him along the Lake's edge. The kingfisher and the moorhen spoke to him, one of rushing water, the other of pools so still that the reflection of a cloud on their surface was like a whisper."¹

These are the elements which draw him home after the failure of his life in London. Here, for Adam, there is no failure, here, on the beloved soil. Here he comes—like so many of Hugh Walpole's characters—to write.

Benjie's love of the soil is deep, wild and fantastic, coloured with his own personality. His is the Koppelberg Hill notion of the Men under Skiddaw: of the cavern, the deep, subterranean hall beneath the mountain where all good men of Cumberland gather and are merry to eternity's end, all men "to whom this country is the best in the world." There, towering among the happy shades, is Rogue Herries; there is Benjie's great-grandfather David, there John Peel, Wordsworth, Southey, little Hartley Coleridge, Will Ritson of Wasdale, James Jackson of Whitehaven—all good men that Cumbrian soil has made, returned truly to Cumbrian soil, never again to leave it. Benjie ought, one feels, to have had the vision of the White Horse. Why not? The Rogue had it, and his son Francis had it, and bequeathed it to his son John, and it breaks into Sally's childhood. Perhaps Benjie had it as well, although we are not told about it; it is the vision of all the seekers of that Beauty beyond Beauty, and although this is not precisely the moment at which to speak of it we will do so: first because it is impossible to think of certain of the Herries without thinking of the White Horse, and secondly because it is an intrinsic part of the spiritual background to the Saga which we are now discussing:

"His eyes open, he would have sworn, staring into the stars he had beheld a vision. He was in a region of vast, peaked, icy mountains. Their fierce and lonely purity, as, silver-

¹ *The Fortress.*

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pointed, they broke the dark sky, caused him to cry out with wonder. The sky was dark; the mountains glittering white, they ringed round a small mere or tarn, black as steel in shadow.

"There was absolute silence in this world. Then as he looked he saw a great white horse, glorious beyond any ever beheld by man, come, tossing his great white mane, to the edge of the mere. He hesitated, lifting his noble head as though listening, then plunged in. He swam superbly, tossing his mane, and Francis could see silver drops glistening in the icy air. He swam to the farther side; and then Francis was seized with an agonising terror lest he should not be able to climb, out of the mere, up the icy side of the cliff that ran sheer into the water. That moment of suspense was fearful and compounded of a great love for the splendid horse, a great tenderness, a great reverence and an anguish of apprehension.

"Then, tossing his mane once more, the beautiful horse mounted out of the mere, strode superbly across the ice and vanished. Then, again, there was great loneliness."¹

One is irresistibly reminded, in this piece of writing, of *The Passing of Arthur*, of arms "clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful," and of the water that whispered in the reeds of another mere. Here, in words of the utmost simplicity, Hugh Walpole has given free rein to his romantic impulse, and from a stylist's point of view, it is interesting to observe the impressive value of the repetition of certain plain adjectives and adverbs—the triple "icy," the double "superbly," almost sufficient in themselves to give us the whole atmosphere of the scene.

To return, for one moment, to the connection of the principal Herries characters with their soil—Vanessa's love for it is deep and spiritual like herself.

"There was something deeper here, some inheritance that was mixed up with all the truest, most important things in life. Her love of this place was her key to connection between the two worlds."²

¹ *Rogue Herries.*

² *Vanessa.*

Sally and Tom, the Herries of to-day, come back to it instinctively for comfort in their heart-sickness, and it is Tom who epitomises it in a last phrase:

"There are none of us here any more. But it's caught one after another of us, set its seal on us, made us influence others. Perhaps, although we haven't any of us been very important, we've altered England's history by coming here. That's what a small piece of country can do."¹

4

It is impossible to do justice to the Herries Saga without some consideration of the material background of the four books.

To get their full bouquet they should be read, as I have just read them, one immediately after the other: three thousand odd pages, three days' reading, a week's reading, a fortnight's reading, according to whether one is fast or slow. It is an act of faith and enthusiasm, but richly worth while. Only in this way is it possible to feel every bit of history clicking into place, like the pieces of a Chinese puzzle: to link up town with country, generation with generation, to trace the silver thread of motive from volume to volume, to feel the full directive drive of heredity, to experience that moving on in time and space that is marked by the change in custom and manners. It is impossible by reading one volume in an isolated fashion to get the full force of this epic of country and family, or to appreciate that vast shifting background against which Hugh Walpole manoeuvres his characters, without comparing it with that which was before, that which is to come.

Some of the writing is in the highest degree coloratura; some Hugh Walpole himself dismisses as mere journalism—notably the Sayers-Heenan fight chapter in *The Fortress*, upon which practically every critic seized at the time of the book's publication for especial praise. It is not usual to applaud a book, or even a succession of books, on the score of physical energy which they represent, but it must be acknowledged that the Herries Saga

¹ *Vanessa*.

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represents a sum of intellectual and physical energy unequalled by any contemporary writer.

There are certain catchphrases which, because of their unpleasant association with a pretentious body of soi-disant literary patrons, one has learnt to avoid: such words as "patina," "vibrations" and "emotional texture." These seem to regain their primitive sincerity when mentally applied to Hugh Walpole's background. That quality of brushwork, to which I have already referred, enters so markedly into some of his descriptive passages that sometimes one is impelled to wonder if one is reading in *print* or in *paint*.

A peculiar charm of the four books lies in the clear delight with which the author handles his vast dual background of town and country. This joy in description is another true romantic attribute, and an exceptionally infectious one, for, as Mr. St. John Ervine says, "It is easier to share a man's enthusiasms than his hatreds." Mr. Walpole does not trouble us with his hatreds: it is therefore the more easy to share his enthusiasms.

There is, first and foremost, his enthusiasm for crowd depiction. Here Hugh Walpole stands absolutely without rival. There is that about his crowd scenes which no other writer achieves: a rustle, a surge, a throb of authentic apprehension, an excitement, a fullness, a genuine sense of jostle and thrust, something delightfully gay, dangerous or sinister as the occasion may warrant. Such scenes are the Chinese Fair and the May-day Feast, in *Rogue Herries*: Vauxhall Gardens, the Hanging and the Café des Mille Colonnes, in *Judith Paris*; the Summer Fair, the Coronation, the Pantheon Bazaar, the Chartist riots, the Great Exhibition, the Sayers-Heenan fight in *The Fortress*: and the Jubilee Celebrations, the Relief of Mafeking and the General strike of 1926 in *Vanessa*. To each of these he brings a youthful zest, a delight in multitude and an emotional unity that infects the reader with an answering excitement.

There is his enthusiasm in the depiction of family celebrations. The Herries love vast hospitalities, and their creator abandons himself to these with an orgic rapture. There is, in *Rogue*

Herries, the Christmas Feast at Statesman Peel's with its Play-Jigg, its Lord of Misrule, its gluttony and lechery and wild dancing, its fatal encounter and its bloody climax—for there is nothing isolated in the introduction of such scenes, the destinies of their participators are invariably closely woven into them. There is the funeral with its clan-gathering of Maria Herries, who so offended them all by failing to reach her hundredth birthday. There is the grand Herries Ball, all shimmering candle-light, fiddle, fife and drum, orgeat and sillabub, at which Deborah meets her future husband. In *Judith Paris* there is the even grander Herries Ball at Will's fine London house—the ball that goes “all wrong,” because the Herries have not yet properly found their feet on the social ice: the ball at which feud is declared between two branches of the family over a lady's broken fan. Oh, the long repercussions of that fan quarrel, the death and despair and madness that followed because Jennifer absently picked up and cracked between idle fingers the stick of Christabel's blue fan!

In *The Fortress* there is the fine ceremonial opening of Walter Herries' new house, with fox-chase and ball, and a dying woman across the valley to lend it poignancy; there is the Christmas party at Uldale, with “Down the Long Lonnins” and “Hops and Peas and Barleycorn,” and Madame—adorable Madame—all attired (although I have no business to mention it here) in cream and silver and cream again, with embroideries of red roses, slapping the face of her enemy Walter, and ordering him out of her house. There is the elegant Garden Party, with all the young ladies playing croquet in crinolines—how far a cry from the savage joys of Borrowdale! There is the Hundredth Birthday, which one hardly needs to read, in order to imagine what an occasion this must have been for the Herries. And in *Vanessa* there stand out, among a ruffle of gaieties, the Wrexe Ball at which Vanessa gives her fatal promise to marry Ellis, the Last Ball at Hill Street with its incredible three-page announcement of guests—the apotheosis, not only of Herries hospitality, but of Herries' social eminence—and the Herries Dinner on the de-

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claration of war in 1914, when a lighted candle is passed from hand to hand, and each member of the family wishes the rest good luck. In nothing is Hugh Walpole so typically English as in these descriptions of English hospitalities, so gay, so lavish, so pompous and so warm-hearted.

His familiar delight in colour and decorative detail scatters itself through the pages of the four books like a fountain of jewels. He shows the sensitiveness of a modern house decorator for "period" interiors. It is out of the question to give examples of these, for, having, with pain and travail of spirit, made choice of an example, others would infallibly present themselves with a prior claim to quotation. Casually from our memories we can snatch at the Westaways' drawing-room, Harcourt Herries' rooms at Cockermouth, Adam's parlour with its sand picture by Zobel. Other shreds of brightness are scattered like stardust across our recollections of the books—a purple macaw in a gilt cage, a little black boy who hands chocolate, Vanessa's scarlet-laquered Chinese clock, Judith's ivory cane, and the old sofa with its woolwork fruits that she so loved and Dorothy wanted to get rid of, the scent of lilac, a silver box.

Then there is his enthusiasm for descriptions of masculine and feminine apparel. The four books afford almost a complete history of costume over the two centuries: we are made free of a delicious sensualism of materials and colours and silhouettes, from Mrs. Cumberledge:

(" Her face was very red and she had on top of it her best wig, powdered, curled and greased, dressed high over a large cushion and decorated with imitation fruit and a little ship with silken sails ")—¹

—to Dorothy Bellairs in her walking-costume.

" She was in the very newest fashion—a brown ' pork-pie ' hat with a dark red feather, a chignon, and her crinoline raised several inches from the ground, revealing that her stout feet were encased in miniature Hessian boots." ²

¹ *Rogue Herries.*

² *The Fortress.*

If Hugh Walpole is a little less lyric in his descriptions of the dresses of a later period, it may be that the clothes of the twentieth century do not lend themselves to lyricism: at any rate he does not omit the mutton-chop sleeve, and Rose Ormeral, almost too smart to be true, in her grey and scarlet Scottish plaid and little expensive hat. Nor is he less explicit in dressing his menfolk, from the Rogue in his dizzy magnificence of claret-coloured coat and fluted grey silk waistcoat, stamped with red roses, and his Harcourt, with "everything about him refined, from the thin gold ring with a green stone on his finger, to the rich rose-colour of his skirted coat"—to the attire in which John goes to his fatal encounter, and enrages Uhland with his elegance.

"He wore a narrow blue tie over which his shirt collar was folded, and his shirt had an inset breast of the finest linen. He wore a waistcoat of dark blue patterned with tiny dark red flowers."¹

Feminine readers will note that Hugh Walpole has in marked degree the supposed masculine preference for shades of red!

Of Hugh Walpole's delight in and lyric response to every form of beauty in Nature sufficient example has already been given; there only remains to mention, in connection with this background which we are considering, his delight in the introduction of historical personages as supporters to his fictional characters—a not uncommon literary device, but one that is seldom handled with the success achieved by Mr. Walpole.

It is always a ticklish business bringing actual persons on to the stage with puppets. They seldom combine; either the puppets resent it, and elbow and jostle the usurper of their dramatic privileges out of the limelight, or the person takes charge and shows up the puppets for the poor, wooden, wire-jiggled deceptions that they are. Especially is this likely to be the case if the writer is in the least nervous or self-conscious in his experiment.

But the Herries having assumed historic actuality in his mind, Mr. Walpole has no compunction in introducing among them

¹ *The Fortress.*

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characters of established historical importance. Let it at once be said that he brings a most scrupulous sense of historical probabilities to his exercise of literary licence. Perhaps his most startling experiment is in giving the actor Betty to Mirabell Herries as her lover; but, after all, why not? How much is known of Betty, out of the limelight? It would be ungracious to quibble on such a trifle. In *Rogue Herries* we have a meeting with that hero of all time, the young Charles Edward, called The Pretender: we hear Whitefield the preacher, and witness Betty's Othello, or, rather, a glimpse of it. The actual meeting with Betty occurs behind the scenes, when the "mysterious aristocracy" of *Rogue Herries* is contrasted with the ignobility of the strolling player. In *Judith Paris* we are given "close-ups" of Wordsworth, Mrs. Southey, Mrs. Coleridge, Hartley Coleridge, La Belle Limonadière, Walter Scott and glimpses of at least a dozen more. As Judith says, "All the kings eating chicken only a yard away. And I have spoken to Walter Scott and heard the Duke of Wellington say 'Damnation!'" The habit grows upon Mr. Walpole, for in the same volume we have Francis meeting Rogers and Macaulay in Hatchard's bookshop; we learn in letters of meetings with Disraeli, the Bulwers and Harrison Ainsworth. Feargus O'Connor stalks into our midst. Harriet Martineau invites herself to tea with Madame at Uldale. And, once in the Victorian age, we are inundated with them—with all the votaries of Thespis, with the æsthetics, with Ford Madox Brown and Oscar Wilde, who indulges in typical, if a trifle heavy, Wilde-isms (it was not one of his best days) against the background of a Herries drawing-room.

In concluding, it is impossible to avoid reporting Mr. Walpole's engaging theft of a character from contemporary fiction and his deft introduction of it among his own people:

"Warren had encountered . . . a business friend of Will's, a Monsieur Rakonitz of the famous Viennese jewellers, and he knew everyone: had supped with Blücher and shown rubies to the King of Prussia and sold a bracelet to Fouché. He had suggested that he should find three tickets for Warren.

In all probability he had some deal with Will in hand, or wanted Will's influence for something. In any case, he was a grand jolly fellow, with a big beard and his hat cocked on one side. Then, unlike so many men with their hats cocked on one side, he had remembered his promise, and Warren had had his tickets."

The question of the ethics of this literary brigandage rests between Mr. Walpole and Miss G. B. Stern. But one cannot, irreverently, refrain from wondering what will happen if, taking Mr. Walpole's action for precedent, Mrs. Virginia Woolf should feel moved to make use of Jeeves, and Mr. P. G. Wodehouse address a polite note to Mrs. Virginia Woolf, asking for the temporary loan of Orlando.¹

5

In an earlier chapter of this book, I preferred a somewhat grave charge against Mr. Walpole: accusing him, in brief, of being unable to create a young heroine who can compete in interest with his masculine heroic characters. In the *Herries Saga* he demolishes this accusation, not with a single character (Judith alone would be enough to constitute a defence), but with a dozen. In spite of the strength of the male *Herries* characters, no shade is cast over the women who stand side by side with them. One is aware of the young women, of their directive influence, as one is of the young men. We believe in Sarah, whose brave charm drives David to court death in the mountains: we believe in Jennifer, whose indolent beauty is Francis's bane: we believe in the warm, loving Deborah, and are surprised at her remaining for so many years a spinster, before Gordon Sunwood discovers her quality: we believe in the lovely and gentle Elizabeth's hold upon John: we believe in Sylvia's rake-hell attraction, and in Rose Ormerai: and we believe in Sally, sick of her century's sickness. And in saying we believe in them we mean that we believe in their romantic quality, we believe in them

¹ Of course, Mr. Walpole has not actually created a precedent: Sir Harry Johnson, in borrowing the *Dombey*s and Mrs. Warren, had already done so.

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from a point of view of their sex and in its effect upon their lovers. They are not mermaids, or angels, or schoolmistresses in petticoats, or propagandists, or prefects with their hair up. They have not the dreary candour of the majority of Mr. Walpole's Young Ladies, they have that *something*, mysterious and indefinable as romance itself, which disturbs the consciousness of the men with whom they come in contact: they are capable of causing troublous nights: they inspire waking dreams. And, look! We have not so much as mentioned the wildest, most dreamlike of them all—Mirabell Starr, or her daughter, Judith Paris, of whom it is so difficult to write with the cool impersonality required of analysis that I shall not attempt the task.

The general feeling that these women characters give one is that Hugh Walpole has written of them as a man should write of women. One cannot but believe that he himself was deeply moved by them: that, instead of deliberately building up, according to convention, a female hero (this seems better to describe them than the term heroine, with all its subtle implications), he abandoned himself and his pen to emotion, and left the rest to God! The result is a quickening of the romantic tempo and a deepening of the emotional channel between the author and his readers.

He no longer displays that self-conscious jibbing away from the profane aspect of love which weakens his earlier novels, and which is curious in view of his proven determination to lead man to Paradise by Inferno. There is a lovely and lofty passage in which, through the mouth of Rogue Herries, he draws the distinction between love sacred and love profane:

“ ‘ Loved! ’ he interrupted her. ‘ Love and love! Do you call that love? I have never known what love is. ’Tis a wonder that waits always round the corner. If ever I do know, then I will be faithful. But *our* love! My dear, you use words too lightly. ’ ”¹

That is a new note for Hugh Walpole; a note of courage

¹ *Rogue Herries.*

that he has not previously sounded. And it is superbly true to life. Man's physical bondage to a woman he despises is so common a situation that almost all the modern novelists have made play with it; it derives a new importance from the eighteenth-century setting which Hugh Walpole gives it: and it performs its true artistic function in heightening the spiritual significance of the scene when, for the first time, Rogue Herries comes face to face with sacred love, in a cave on Honister.

"At that she turned and looked up at him, and as his eyes met hers, he knew two things: that he loved her and that he had never before, in all his ventures, known what love was."¹

The beauty, tenderness and loftiness of his love for Mirabell, its purity and humility, are magnified by the contrast with his former amatory adventures, which, instead of concealing or glossing over, Hugh Walpole has done his duty as novelist in allowing us to see in all their grossness. He loves Mirabell so dearly that he becomes wholly noble through it. He loses all vanity, pride and self-love, and even that false pride that makes a man deny when he is stricken to the soul.

"I have been for a long time in search of my wife, who left me in a misunderstanding five years ago."

"I have heard something of it," said Mr. Harness, gravely.

"Herries nodded his head. 'I speak of it to everyone I meet, for it may happen that they have heard of her.'"²

Thus his grief dignifies him, and all that is noble triumphs over all that is base in his character. It is in connection with Mirabell Starr that we are shown most clearly the duality of his character, the angel and the devil that war within him—the angel that yearns to protect, the devil that brings him to the point of ravishing her, when, torn by his love and need, asking only her love, he is confounded by the indifference of one who is wedded to a ghost. Such a scene repeats itself more than a hundred years later, between Vanessa and Ellis: only Ellis knows that Vanessa's love is given to no ghost, but to the very

¹ *Rogue Herries*.

² *Ibid.*

actual and fleshly Benjie. But the vital point is that we never for a moment question the power of these women to rouse these violent passions in the men who love them; we no more doubt Mirabell's power to make an angel of Francis than we doubt Alice Press's power to make a devil of him. Her "face of an angry child," the sunset banner of her hair, all her pathos, all her bitter experience ("I was ravished when I was twelve. I had seen four men foully murdered before I was sixteen years of age; one was all night in dying, his head in my lap, his blood soaking my clothes"), her beautiful young lover who was stabbed at her side, her tragic consciousness of being a ghost endow her with the miraculous quality which none of Hugh Walpole's women had had before her.

And how shall one write of her daughter Judith?—the child she bore to Herries on a day when the "wind blew and the snow piled up against the house and began softly to climb the windows": the child who was found crying in an empty house of death, and lived through a hundred years of every sort of tragic and gay experience, to triumph over it all?

In one of those foolish questionnaires that demand one's "favourite character in fiction" I should unhesitatingly write down "Judith Paris," in whose small body burnt a sufficient ardour to equip the whole Herries tribe: whose power to love is only second to her will to dominate: whose spiritual independence will brook no Herries bondage, and whose loyalties betray her even more deeply than her loves. She seems to exist perpetually in the heart of a furnace: fire is her natural element. Her morals are the morals of the Regency; she has the strength and the courage to impose them upon the more conventional people among whom she lives. She would have been happier, perhaps, a century earlier; had she come into the Rogue's life at its prime, instead of at the very end, the pair of them would have ruffled and swashbuckled it in perfect amity and understanding. That part of her father lives again in her: she is the Rogue in petticoats—but lacking that destructive streak of pure idealism that complicated his existence. The pocket Venus,

with "her lithe figure like a cut jewel," is essentially a materialist: herein lies her hold upon the Herries family as a whole. Never would they otherwise have accepted the autocracy of one of those dangerous, boggy-driven Cumbrian Herries, for ever darting away round corners after the unattainable, and imperilling that which had been attained by their crazy adventures. All the things that Judith most desires are attainable, and it is her life work to attain them. There is in *Rogue Herries* a conversation between Mirabell and the Rogue's daughter, Deborah, in reference to Francis himself, which contains a sentence easily translatable into a description of Judith:

" 'He went away, but I still remembered him. He is not easy to forget. He is a Man, not half a man or a piece of one, but a whole one made in one block like carved stone.' "

Her character is a splinter of Cumbrian rock, which she drives into the yielding surfaces around her: to which the weaker elements come for shelter, for support, for shade from the pitiless sun which she takes full in unwinking eyes. Unlike her mother, she is not incapacitated for her part in life by the death of the only man she loves: the man whose physical and spiritual maltreatment she has taken with the same ecstasy as she took his love-making. She goes to London, to Wiltshire, she drags the Herries mantle about her nakedness until she is ready to face again the undying reminder of her life's tragedy. For face it she must; "the other half of me is buried in Cumberland peat": no ghost of a man lying dead on a stone floor must stand in the way of her return to the place where, alone, she is fully herself.

So, pouncing upon a motive that presents itself pat to her hand, she takes control of the tangled affairs of Francis and Jennifer: Francis, her so much older nephew, whom she has always loved, and pitied, for he was so much less equipped than she for dealing with the world, and Jennifer, whose cause she has espoused, in the fan fracas, out of sheer autocracy, with little thought of how far that espousal was to lead her. It had been amusing to go as a gay vagabond to that grand ball, dressed as her mother, in ragged

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gipsy scarlet: a fine stone to fling at Herries' pomposity! It was Judith's last purely childish gesture, for after that came the deluge of Georges' flight and murder, from which she only recovered to find Francis clinging like a crying child to her skirts, demanding—and not he alone, but his wife and family—that she should act like a grown woman, and protect them all from the following animosity of Walter Herries.

She takes as lover her kinsman, Warren Forster, and here again violence and death follow her, for Warren dies in a fracas in the Palais-Royal, a few hours before her child, Adam, is born.

Her long struggle to dominate Adam as she dominates the rest of her family is the theme of the early part of *The Fortress*, whose later history is the history of her growth in authority, her implacable resistance to the malign attentions of Walter Herries and her decline into old age. Decline is an oddly inappropriate word: for the older she gets, the stronger appears her hold on the lives and the loves of the people about her. It is she, and not his gentle mother Elizabeth, who subdues the obstreperous Benjie: "There, you see. All that is needed is a little firmness." At ninety or thereabouts she explodes on the subject of someone's review of Tennyson's *Idylls*:

" "Chastity and moral elevation! Stuff! Did you ever hear such humbug and hypocritical nonsense, Mrs. Osmaston?"—"

—bursts out laughing at Dorothy's American Cage, takes robust views on the new Sabbath and scandalises her spinster grand-niece Jane (or is it great-grand-niece?) with the following:

" "Everyone is so prudish nowadays that they are ashamed to talk of going to bed with a man. It's perfectly natural. Nothing to be ashamed of. But although they won't speak of it they think of nothing else. It's all the same whoever it is—Mrs. Osmaston, Helen Withering, Mrs. James Anstruther. How shall we marry our daughters? We must put our girls to bed with a man the first possible opportunity, do everything we can, dress them so as to accentuate their figures, throw

¹ *The Fortress*.

them at every man we see, everything to marry them—but speak of what happens when they *are* married—oh, dear me, no! ’ ’ ’¹

So much courage, so much gaiety, so clear and steady a little flame burning on the eve of the hundredth birthday! What is the invisible shield that has protected her light from the blasts that have threatened to quench it, not once, nor twice, but again and again, throughout the hundred years? The death of Georges, the death of Francis, the awful deaths of John and Uhland—all people close to her, bound to her by the peculiar intensity of the Herries bond, sped unceremoniously from a difficult world whose difficulties she alone seems to have had power, if not to solve, to subdue to her own purposes. As a child she had said, “I hate women, with their exaggerations and sentiment.” There is little of either in her own make-up; her character giving out a clear, crystallic ring, like a wineglass. Its purity derives from the fact that she has thrown out all the lees of petty emotion, the dregs of obscure metaphysical conjecturings that have confused many of her tribe. The thing that one can see, can touch, can operate is always more important to Judith than the invisible and intangible. She goes straight to her objective like a sped arrow: whether that objective be love, or hate, or power. In her old age she attains to a certain grandeur, a certain formality which she employs on those who need to be reminded of their duty: but in dying her soul flings off such ceremonial trappings. There is no Judith Paris, in cream and silver and cream again, to sweep up to the Throne of Light, and announce her arrival with due regard for the importance of such an occasion. “Georges! Georges! . . . Charlie! Warren! . . . Father!” A little figure runs to fling itself into nearer and dearer arms: to press its lips on theirs and feel the beloved embrace: rejoicing in the end of all separation—before going on, in its own good time, into the Presence.

It is, as we already know, no new thing for Hugh Walpole to give us a highly impressive and emotional study of old age. The Judith of the latter part of *The Fortress* is the Duchess of

¹ *The Fortress*.

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Wrexe, stripped of her theatricalisms, strengthened because, instead of shrouding herself in mystery, she bares her brave head to the helm-wind. But for the purpose of our argument, which is that in Judith Hugh Walpole actually gives his readers a Young Heroine, it is her youth that is important: Judith taking a thrashing from David, Judith ("A fascinating little hat on the side of her red hair and a little hoop with silver ships painted on it") risking another thrashing to sail upon the lake with her French schoolboy "fleurrt," Judith engineering the escape of her nephew Humphrey, Judith adoring Francis and standing up for him to Sarah, Judith flouncing away to Stone Ends, to live riotously with Uncle Tom Gauntry and his buxom mistress, Judith delivering herself with passion to Georges Paris, the flame-like Judith of Watendlath—flame in a duffle gown; Judith, in her nightgown, giving impersonations of all the Herries to Emma Furze, while Georges snores, Judith sitting gravely in the green moonlight when Georges has flung her out of bed—Judith with the "very tender heart and no sentimentality"—it is about this Judith that all the heady excitement, the provocation, the danger and delight and glamour of the Young Heroine cling: in other words, about the girl, whose girlhood ends on a rainy afternoon, with a tumble downstairs.

"Hold my eyes, Judy. Oh, Judy, darling! How I love you!"

"And I you, Georges, always. Oh, Christ, for help. Someone to help. . . ."

"Nothing to be done.' . . ."

"I love you—for ever——"¹

From this moment onward her character changes; she is no longer the Young Heroine, she is simply the Heroine, the strong, responsible being: "all passion spent," save the passion for domination—the true Herries passion.

If Hugh Walpole is a little less successful in the matter of "glamour" where his next Young Heroine is concerned, it is because in Vanessa he is handling a totally different nature. There is less sensationalism, more intellect, and much more

¹ *Judith Paris.*

spirituality in Vanessa's character. The times had altered: society lent itself less readily to the picturesque: the Victorian convention laid its heavy shadow upon England—especially feminine England. Her mother dead, Vanessa suffered less from the Victorian convention than the majority of her young relations: but it is Vanessa's essential goodness that scares Benjie and holds him at bay, and it is the tragedy of her goodness, his own recognised inability to live up to it, which precipitates his disastrous marriage. This sounds a starchy introduction for a Young Heroine; but Vanessa is very far from being starchy. Her first Ball—the Hundredth Birthday Ball—where she seriously tries out the advice that Benjie gives her, to flatter her partners, with charming results—is enchanting. There is no getting away from it: Vanessa is a darling. She believes in God and she loves all the world; her warmth, her tenderness and her beauty radiate their triple glow whenever she appears.

Now Hugh Walpole has written before about young ladies who had warmth and tenderness and beauty, who loved God and were successes at their first balls; why is it that over these others we have bowed our heads in polite acknowledgment of Mr. Walpole's claims on their behalf, whereas, when we are told that the year 1882 was remembered throughout the family as the year "when Vanessa first came to town," we nod our heads very vigorously, and say, "Of course, of course, it must have been so"? Why is it that we can so easily accept the effect that this young woman had upon those who met her, can share their enthusiasm and believe in the excitement she inspired, when, for those others, we have very little beyond a chill theoretical acceptance of their detailed qualities and charms? Vanessa is a contemporary of Rachel Seddon: her life marches parallel, or as near parallel as need be, with the Trenchards, with the Grandisons: but it is typical, perhaps, of the relations between these other feminine creations of Hugh Walpole and their public that I have been obliged to look up my notes on *Wintersmoon* to recall Janet Grandison's name! Could one forget Vanessa in the same way? Never.

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The difference lies in Hugh Walpole's approach to his subject. If he had written about Vanessa at the beginning, instead of at the end of the Herries Saga, it is possible that she would have turned out merely another Trenchard or another Grandison. But since creating his Trenchards and Grandisons the writer has stripped off his gloves; he has announced, and proved, that his intention is no longer to write for the Grandisons and Trenchards: that his assault is now to be on stronger intellects, more robust judgments. His background is no longer to be teacups or, alternatively, Cornish fogs. He is to cut the true-lovers' knot of convention, and deal for the first time with a people who find the shadows of cathedrals a little ridiculous. This breaking out in the creation of his earlier Herries was bound to influence his subsequent writing (we have seen how it influenced his creation of Helen in *Above the Dark Circus*). There is courage and strength and unconventionality where there was formerly an immense respect for the conventions. He attacks Vanessa, precisely as he attacks Judith, instead of approaching her respectfully, hat in hand, with apologies and justifications. Both Judith and Vanessa are above justification; the writer sees it, and allows us to see that he sees it.

Vanessa is the Great Lover, as Judith is the Great Autocrat. And her strength and purpose in living are as Judith's; she brings Judith's remedy of instant action to every agony she endures; she is no dreamer, although the White Horse is known to her, as it was known to her great-grandfather. How did Vanessa come by the story of the White Horse? It must have been through her Aunt Jane, who had the vision as a little girl, for one feels it is not a part of Vanessa's spiritual make-up to have visions of White Horses. Her challenge to the inane Marrable woman—who, alas, is not dead even in this enlightened age—reveals her moral superiority to the women of her times, which, later on, is ratified by her escape with Benjie, her brave and happy life with him, her true marriage, which she relinquishes at its most idyllic and exquisite moment, to return and resume her responsibilities to Ellis, her insane husband. Her death

breaks the back of the book: it is a structural, although not an artistic, weakness in the final volume of the Herries Saga. From Vanessa's death the whole Herries monument crumbles away: her light plays faintly, with a white inextinguishable radiance, over the ruins: upon Tom in France, upon Benjie in Galicia, upon little Sally in London, upon the unhappy Maurice in Flanders—from beyond Beyond she illuminates them all. The death of Vanessa removes a corner-stone; there is nothing left but disintegration, which is precipitated—as the world disintegration was precipitated—by the world-war. The scattering, the lack of cohesion of these latter-day Herries are mere naturalism; the family must have been superhuman if it had survived the years 1914 to 1918. From the scrappiness—almost the impressionism—of those final chapters emerges the figure of Sally, Vanessa's child by Benjie, the Young Heroine of to-day.

The importance of Sally, *qua* heroine, lies in the fact that she is literally Hugh Walpole's first attempt to draw the Modern Girl. With her "the younger generation comes knock, knock, knocking at the door": she is Noel Coward's young woman plus Herries, a combination which, as any reader will admit, makes for surprises. She is from this point of view the most important and successful of Hugh Walpole's creations, in that she is utterly new, not only to these four books, but to the whole of his work, and that she is strong enough to hold together the whole post-Vanessa section of the novel.

Sally, as a child, is a tiny Judith, with all Judith's independence and fearlessness; she grows up to inherit the pathos of her thwarted generation, into which the war crashed with the force of a volcanic explosion, shattering minds and hearts and ideals. Her loves are Vanessa and her half-brother Tom, Benjie's son by his marriage with Marion Hathaway, and, later in the hopeless, protective style that became woman's fashion after the war, when every man had become the object of every woman's solicitude, a young man with no chin, Arnold Young. Her description of her feeling for Arnold is triumphantly modern:

" " He doesn't seem to care for girls. He's terribly under

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his mother's influence. That's the worst thing about him. But he isn't one of those, you know, or anything like that. Not a bit nancy. I don't say he's very fine or grand or wonderful. I'm just in love with him, that's all—here in the pit of the stomach! ' ”¹

All the nobility of Sally rises to the surface of this pathetic love affair; her courage and her honesty and her earnestness. She has, besides, charming qualities: her gallantry to the old bore Horace Newmark is one of them. One feels that, in common with the best type of modern young woman, Sally would be incapable of doing anything ungentlemanly. She wears her illegitimacy like a halo:

“ ‘ I'll tell you something—I'm as good as anyone in England, as proud and independent. I had the grandest mother anyone ever had. There never has been and there never will be again anyone as fine as Vanessa. And I don't want your damned charity. And your mother can be as grand as she likes but I'm not going on to my knees and imploring her—— ’ ”²

On the heels of this outburst she gives herself to Arnold, who, poor invertebrate, is too afraid of his mother, of her prejudice against Sally's birth, to make her honourably his wife. When Arnold deserts her, as he naturally does, she makes a clean end to it; her farewell to her faithless lover is the perfection of gallantry, the fine gesture with which modern youth likes to conceal its deepest wounds:

“ ‘ Now cut along. We've had a lovely time, and I don't blame you a little bit. ’ ”³

But the finest piece of writing in this section—subtitled “The Ghost”: Mr. Walpole is fond of sub-titles—is that which shows Sally, her pride laid low, sobbing in her father's arms. In the relationship between Benjie and Sally is distilled all that is tenderest and most idealistic in their natures. Her

¹ *Vanessa.*

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

marriage to the blind Raymond Herriot after Tom's death seems the fitting climax to her urge towards self-sacrifice and service.

In conclusion one may be allowed to suggest that, while it was relatively easy for an author of Mr. Walpole's idiosyncrasy to write bravely and without self-consciousness of the girlhood of Judith Paris, removed by more than a century from the embarrassing immediate (just as the average conventional person can allude without turning a hair to scandalous episodes in the life of a distant ancestor, which he would be strangled rather than mention if they concerned a first cousin), it would have been practically impossible for him to have created a Sally Herries without the experience afforded by writing the first three books of the Saga. At some moment in the writing of *Rogue Herries* or *Judith Paris*, at some stage of Mr. Walpole's spiritual escape from the domestic, the *bourgeois* and the conventional, which he, least *bourgeois* of individuals, had for his inscrutable reasons made his literary medium, he had made the discovery, subconsciously, that it was possible to write of the Modern Young Woman with as much zest and abandonment as he had written of her mother and her grandmother. It was an important discovery for Mr. Walpole, for it meant that the barriers, once destroyed, could never go up again: that because he had written the Herries Saga he was a freer man and a more complete artist than he had heretofore been.

Sally, isolated, might, from her creator's point of view, have presented insuperable difficulties: but Sally interpreted by her forefathers was not only easy, she was inevitable. He knew her, because he had known the Rogue, because he had known Judith, and Vanessa, and Benjie: through Judith and Vanessa he had found a way to write about her.

6

"During the flight of the Eagle two hundred years are but as a day, and the life of a man, as against all odds he pushes towards immortality, is eternal."

"The world seems to be crumbling, but it has crumbled so

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often before, changing into a new shape that will appear as solid to other generations as its earlier form seemed to the older people."

Let us, in conclusion, consider the pattern of Hugh Walpole's epic, its theme, the unities that bind it together: for the four books are one book, and it remains for us to decide the secret of their oneness.

Somewhere there is a Lake, a Water still as life and death, green as the eternal hopes and aspirations of mankind. Into it a Hand—never mind whose—drops a stone; what happens? Circles and circles and circles: widening until the whole surface is rippled into rings that take their shape from the momentary whirlpool caused by the dropping of the stone: changing in size and colour, resurgent, turbulent, polemical, breaking into and out of one another, but weakening, weakening—until the last tremor dies; remains but a glaucous emerald. Somewhere there is a Lake. . . .

This, figuratively speaking, is the design followed by the Herries Saga—of concentric rings widening from a common centre. It takes two hundred years for the ripple to die out of the water; during those two hundred years the circles widen and widen, break into and out of one another, hold their shape by virtue of that magnetic force hidden in the centuries, tremble on the edge of dissolution, shudder and fade as they pass out of the radius of the controlling power.

And the controlling power itself? What is it but the fusion of Family and Locality that first takes place in a manor-house under Watendlath Fell? The Lake, the Stone; Borrowdale, Rogue Herries. The Hand? Whose other than that of Hugh Walpole's Leading Character.

Take a place, he says, in effect, and take a person; work them together until particles of the one mingle with particles of the other: until their friction generates a force so virile that it must go on propagating itself until that force is spent. The generated force will be stronger than either of the elements which caused

it, and may prolong, *ad infinitum*, the influence of the generative elements. The moment of extinction is determined by the strength implicit in the two contiguous entities, but since this is not equalised two things must happen: the exhaustion of the weaker element and the subsequent cessation of the generative current. Rocks, mountains and torrents—these are the visible pledges of eternity. The human soul pursues its eternity cycle for an age or two within the comprehended bounds of human intelligence, but sooner or later it completes its course by passing into the inapprehensible.

Thus mankind works out its liberation from the finite, and there remain only the scenes of Nature in which it has performed its *agon*, *pathos* and *anagnorisis*.

This is the spacious theme which Hugh Walpole has developed through the four novels. He shows us the family of Herries in gyration about this powerful centrifugal influence; Cumberland, Herries, the North, the people of the North. One may be positive that in Piccadilly or in Bournemouth members of the Herries tribe have that "feeling of the north" which is said to turn the true-born Northerner blindfold towards the Pole Star. From Arcturus derives their strength; the germ of their being, whether or not they are conscious of it, lies in a Cumbrian valley. Their turbulence, their resurgence have their beginnings there, beneath the flight of the Eagle. And as time widens the circle, as the Watendlath-Uldale influence loses its potency, so is their concentric swirl lessened, their energy diffused, their impetus as Herries enfeebled. One feels this very clearly towards the end of *Vanessa*, when there are no Herries left in the valleys.

The shapeliness of the ending brings the Saga to a close on a note of high spiritual significance. Where there was one man only there is again only one man. The Place is getting ready to take possession again; all human passion, turmoil, defeat and strife float away like trails of mist up the mountain-side. Only remains Benjie, frail hostage of fortune; alone, as the Rogue was alone, two hundred years ago. He is an old man. In a very little while the land will be clear for the Eagle again.

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“ During the flight of the Eagle two hundred years are but as a day. . . . ”

The security of Hugh Walpole's longest and greatest work does not rest upon nationality. It is the security of which I spoke in the first chapter of this book; the security which only the Romantic knows, in its full perfection—the security of the Infinite, of all roads leading back to God. Such a way of expressing it may seem simple to the point of naïveté, but it is the point of view of the Romantic. The crucifixion of his Seekers in the flesh, their ascension and immortality, their long struggle, with its victories and defeats, against the Citizens, beat like the heart within the human body from beginning to end of the four books.

7

POSTSCRIPTUM

It is said that Romanticism occurs in waves in the history of a nation: that the Romantic spirit follows the graph of a nation's security and prestige. For centuries Germany stood for the European spirit of Romance; it now appears as though England might challenge her supremacy. It would be both idle and childish to speak, at the present moment, of English security in a national sense; yet one may be pardoned for seeing in the slow and cautious movement of literary (and not only literary, but dramatic) taste towards Romanticism some glimmer of the dawn. It implies, at least, a revolt, feeble, perhaps, and uncertain, against materialism; it implies that people are prepared to pay at any rate a little attention to things which are only to be felt spiritually and emotionally, things which are not dependent upon the senses.

In spite of the fact that stereotyped religion, as represented by the churches, has admittedly failed, there is an immense amount of active interest, especially among the rising generation, in spiritual matters. There is a very definite turning towards God, although not the God in whom the bishops and cardinals claim a

monopoly. Mansoul is claiming its freedom to find its God and approach Him after its own fashion, which is to say, not through the gates of the Cathedral: and because of this search in which so many are engaged there is a general stirring of interest in all that is invisible, intangible and inapprehensible—all, therefore, that has the Romantic quality. God is the Great Romantic.

The Romantic spirit in England reached its zenith during the two wide-apart reigns of Elizabeth and Victoria, having in each case its widely differentiated characteristic, its forms of expression equally distinct. One might casually say that Ben Jonson and Shakespeare were the apostles of the earlier, the Pre-Raphaelites and Tennyson of the later reign. There is no doubt that Elizabethan Romanticism called for "a madder music and for stronger wine": it had every encouragement from the throne, had not, as the later Romanticism had, to struggle through the repressive influences of Puritanism. One does not connect it, as one connects the Victorian brand, with Max Beerbohm's inimitable cartoon of the Laureate, seated at the extreme of an expanse of crimson carpet, declaiming his verse to a distant figure, resembling a tiny sable tea-cosy, flanked and backed by the Albertian image.

The Romanticism of Elizabeth's reign was given its true setting of riot, lavishness and excess. It was not strangled by economies, discouraged by gentlemen in lawn sleeves, or stifled under a tea-cosy. Such a sentiment as:

"Conscience?—'Tis a beggar's virtue . . .
 Thy baths shall be the scent of July flowers,
 Spirits of roses and of violets,
 The milk of unicorns and panthers' breaths
 Gathered in bags and mixt with Cretan wines——"

would surely have suggested improprieties to the Victorian critics; and Propriety—with a capital P—was *à la mode*; it was still novel enough to be great fun, when Tennyson captured his Sovereign's fancy with his metrical appreciations of her husband's virtues!

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The curiously bleaching effect of the Genevan tradition upon all rich colours is clearly shown in the Victorian Romantic output. All the more honour to the latter for its survival in such inimical surroundings. If Tennyson's *Idylls* are romance-and-water—as his *Guinevere*, compared with Morris's *Defence*, most certainly proves itself to be—at least Swinburne managed to capture some authentic strain from “over the hills and far away” in writing—

“On the mountains of memory, by the world's well-springs
In all men's eyes,
Where the light of the life of him is on all past things
Death only dies.”

This is not the Elizabethan Romanticism, or anything like it, but it is something gilded with an immortality which is missing from the papier mâché armour of the Arthurian knights. But, of course, Swinburne, with his Mencken, if not actually at hand, at least in the offing, was safely removed from the menace of the tea-cosy. Secure in outlawry, he could afford to let himself go on his Aholibamahs and Hermaphrodites; he could revel to his heart's content in his sick flowers of secrecy and shade, because he was, not only financially but morally independent of the Puritans and their tiresome prejudices.

The fact remains that, in spite of Tennyson, the Victorian age received its principle Romantic stimulus from its painters. The Pre-Raphaelites were the Romance of the Victorians. It was they who laid the gunpowder to the base of the Albert Memorial—unfortunately, of course, in a figurative sense only. As Americans say, they put English art on the map. In the place of *Peter the Great sees Catherine, his Future Empress for the First Time*, by a person with the truly stupendous name of Augustus Leopold Egg, they gave us *King Cophetua and the Beggar-maid*, *The Blue Closet* and *How They Met Themselves in a Wood*. Not only were the subjects strange and ultramundane, but the treatment was like nothing previously seen in British

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art. The Pre-Raphaélites were the only English artists who ever gave a conscious lead to English literature: in the sense that their banner was revolt, that it diffused a warmth, an ardour, a summons to endeavour, from which the poets, at least, did not withhold response. One art is, as a rule, quick to catch the glow from another, and there can hardly have been a writer of that period who, if he had been perfectly honest, would not have admitted to some freshness, some renewal of vigour in his own work—just because William Morris happened to be carving arm-chairs down at Chiswick, and Rossetti was balancing on a scaffold to do his decorative panels in the Union.

Our own Romanticism approaches more nearly to that of the Elizabethans than the Victorians. Anæmia has worked itself out of English literature; the cry is for sincerity, not affectation. A generation dedicated to sports has little in common with macaroni-pale ladies draped like seaweed over Burne-Jonesian balustrades.

We may not be prepared to return to *The Castle of Otranto*: why should we? To each age its own Romanticism.

But we are ripe for the heroic—not merely the physical—heroic, and certainly not for that type of heroism deriving from *Eric*, which is consistently baffled to fight better, sleeps to wake. We want the heroism with which, in some form or other, each one of us is familiar; heroism with its head in the dust, with its tail between its legs, defeated heroism which is none the less heroism because it is stripped and battered and beaten almost out of recognition. We want the struggle between the flesh and the spirit, the Known and the Unknown, which constitutes the real struggle of human life.

It is the task of the Romantic novelist to portray this familiar struggle. This is the task which Hugh Walpole, in his *Herries Saga*, has performed.

Paddocks, 1933.

